

This Old House

The Best!
TOP 100

New home
products
p. 73

Classic, cozy rooms

11

comfy kitchens
and baths

19

small-space
solutions

11

holiday-decor
ideas


36

pretty painted
spaces

*Brass accents
add a warm
note*

**2015 IDEA
HOUSE** Tour
our country
cottage! p. 51

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2015



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Contents

THIS OLD HOUSE NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2015

*ideas for a
smarter, more
stylish home*

27 **before + after: kitchen**

A mother of two teens opens up her kitchen, customizing the space for family and friends to enjoy

33 **before + after: bath**

Victorian style and 21st-century function merge in this bathroom face-lift

36 **before + after: office**

A home office gets a refresh with energetic wall color and clever wire control

42 **design insider**

Transform a space with moody neutral paint colors

44 **Photoshop redo**

Taking a flat ranch to a new level with a cottage-style makeover

51 **craftsman-style charmer**

Lessons in how to make a small cottage live large, from the TOH 2015 Idea House

64 **true to form**

A design-savvy couple revive a 1920s farmhouse while honoring its past

88 **reader remodel**

A couple of newbie DIYers tackle an Italianate fixer-upper

This Old House » TOP 100

tools



building products



kitchen

bath



finishing touches

home tech



outdoor





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Contents THIS OLD HOUSE NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2015



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On the cover



pp. 27, 33, 51; 51; 17, 38; 27, 33, 36, 38, 40, 42, 44, 51, 64, 88

Cover Photograph by JOHN GRUEN
Styling by INGRID LEES

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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2015



51

CRAFTSMAN-
STYLE
CHARMER



17

HOME
SOLUTIONS

home solutions

- 17 Merry snow people; house-shaped candleholders; pro furniture fixes; keep holiday lights bright and safe; festive tree table-topper; dining room by the numbers; fresh bath-cleaning tips; budget-friendly crafting space

upgrades

- 38 **get this look for less**
A welcoming winter entry
- 73 **the TOH top 100**
The search is complete! We've gathered up the best new products for your house

how-to projects

- 40 **paint ideas**
Fearlessly bring color and pattern to a room with a stenciled accent wall
- 46 **weekend remodel**
Tidy up the playroom with our DIY kids' bookcase

ask this old house

- 95 **Q + A** Choose the best saw to cut down a Christmas tree; clear clogged bathtub drains; keep a brick house warm; prevent rotting in tree-trunk holes; and more

IN EVERY ISSUE

- 11 letter from This Old House
12 reader mail
14 checklist
102 directory
110 save this old house

life is
a meal
for
sharing
secrets,
and a drawer-in-
drawer with
some of its own

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The grandfather of invention

“I need to fabricate a little something here,” Pop said. Confused, as any grandson would be, I wondered what he meant as I watched him use a bulldozer to push a school bus into his shop’s garage. Not that such a sight was unusual. I’d once seen him use a backhoe to lift a sofa to a third-story window rather than take it up the stairs, turn a metal-body Philco refrigerator into a fish smoker, and cook an impromptu lunch by searing pheasant on an anvil with an acetylene torch. His hunting dog, Marky, ate dinner out of a hubcap from a ’55 Bel Air.

I loved my grandfather, but he was not exactly normal. A bit of a self-made man, he started out owning a filling station before moving on to a taxi service, a pair of transportation companies, and a couple of construction outfits—which is why he had both the bus and the dozer on hand. That he somehow ended up with none of it isn’t really beside the point. You see, he never embraced the executive suite or customer needs the way he should have, preferring to tinker in the shop, starting every day in Dickies workwear, finishing it smelling of Zep hand cleaner.

With the bus, he removed its middle 20 feet—along with its seats, roof, sides, floor, and chassis—and then bolted the remaining front and rear pieces together, dropped in the engine it was missing and a shortened drive shaft, and added hydraulics for a snowplow. Turns out his usual plow truck, a war-surplus Willys jeep—the kind with a dash-mounted choke, no doors, and floorboards that rotted away sometime shortly after V-day—had gone the way of Willys-Overland itself, and he needed something to replace it. The truncated transporter was his genius idea.

That was Pop’s problem, I suppose, inventing things he could have bought and not paying enough attention to things that mattered. A philosophy completely unlike that of the men and women whose inventions are featured in our fifth annual TOH Top 100, which you’ll find on page 73. From concrete you can sculpt like clay to a walnut box that affordably sniffs out air-quality hazards to a toilet that won’t overflow when overstuffed, our editors have spent months tracking down the most useful new products for your home. Check them out. They’re all as unique as my grandfather’s dog bowl, blowtorch cooker, or fridge-a-smoker, but not a one belongs on his short bus.

SCOTT OMELIANUK

SCOTT OMELIANUK, EDITOR
scott@thisoldhouse.com



The editor, descended from a line of not-so-great-idea men.



Let me know what’s on your mind and share your DIY adventures on Twitter @scottomelianuk using #TellTOH



Season Standout

TOH TV gets countless emails asking about products the crew uses to get the job done.

Here's one you'll see this season.



When installing supporting lally columns at the Belmont project house, master contractor Tom Silva used **Sakrete's High Strength Concrete Mix** to create a secure and stable footing. Sakrete High Strength is a pre-blended mixture of sand, coarse aggregate, and cementitious materials, ideal for new construction or repairs where concrete thickness exceeds 2 inches.

About \$4 per 80lb. bag; to find a retailer near you, visit **Sakrete.com**.

Tune in to find out how this project turned out! New episodes airing now at thisoldhouse.com/watchTOH.

Reader mail



ONE GREAT IDEA *leads to another. Or so you showed us: Readers sent in lots of nifty suggestions, additions, inspiration, and alternatives in response to stories in the August and September issues. (Find these articles at thisoldhouse.com/novdec2015.)*

Low tech meets high tech

While my daughters and I were on a road trip, we took turns reading the September 2015 *This Old House*. Although we loved the idea of using a roll of kraft paper to make a “DIY To-Do List” [Home Solutions], we all had the same thought: Who is going to haul that big piece of paper shopping? One of them came up with the solution: Snap a picture with your phone and head out the door. Now we can have that cute organizer on the wall and an easy-to-manage shopping list.

—LINDA WIDEL, GREELEY, COLO.

rings along the top edge, and hanging them from rods on my screened porch. I also protected them with waterproofing spray and hemmed them using drapery weights to keep them in place in windy weather. They look a little classy!

—INGRID WARREN, BY E-MAIL

Craftsman inspiration

Thank you for the story about [first-time homeowner] Bradley in “House of Hard Knocks” [September 2015]. Funny, inspiring, and heartwarming. A great read!

—JENNY PARTON, RALEIGH, N.C.

Drop-cloth drapes

[Re Home Solutions, “10 Uses for Canvas Drop Cloths,” September 2015:] Here's one more use: I made drapes with 6-by-9-foot drop cloths by folding over 20 inches at the top, clipping drapery

Coatrack idea

The August 2015 issue's Shopping column featured glass cabinet knobs. Absolutely brilliant! I plan to create a coatrack by screwing glass knobs onto a decorative panel of wood. My favorite

READER
PROJECT
OF THE
MONTH

Mantel bed

JOAN AND EV HUDDLESON,
TRENTON, NEBR.

Love your magazine! Each issue yields creative ideas and inspiration. Here [near right] is **our version of the mantel headboard** from September 2015's Home Solutions.



is the pewter-and-cobalt knob, perhaps alternated with pewter-finished ones. Thanks for the inspiration!

—MIK McALLISTER, SAN FRANCISCO

Fed-up fountain owner

[Re “All About Garden Fountains,” August 2015:] And finally, when you get sick of scrubbing off the green slime, shoveling out soggy leaves, and removing drowned birds, you can fill the whole thing with potting soil and some plants [below]. Just a suggestion from a longtime reader.

—BEV KIRK, BY E-MAIL



Native “hellstrips”

Loved the article on gardening in the “hellspace” between street and sidewalk [Landscaping, August 2015]. My suggestion: Native plants—all perennials, both flowers and grasses—love crummy soil and the weather you have, so they require less watering. They support lots of pollinators, birds, and butterflies. My garden is four years old, and I’ve included plant labels so that neighbors and dog walkers can identify them.

—KAREN NICHOLS, INDIANAPOLIS

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Checklist

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2015

*Easy ways to
improve your home
right now*

6 FAST FIXES

☐ Clean up candlesticks:

Pop wax-covered candlesticks in the freezer for about an hour to help you easily scrape away any messy drips.



☐ Swap out old bulbs: With longer nights, it's a good time to switch to energy-efficient LED lightbulbs, which use up to 80 percent less electricity than incandescents.

☐ Change air filters:

'Tis the season for revving up the heat. Energy Star recommends checking your furnace filter every month during the winter and cleaning or replacing it as needed.

☐ Cook efficiently: Using pots smaller than the size of your burners wastes energy—up to 40 percent if you use a 6-inch pot on an 8-inch burner. Choose an appropriate pot size to help cut down on utility costs.

☐ Silence noisy floors:

Work talcum or baby powder between squeaky floorboards with a dry paintbrush.

☐ Clear out weep holes:

Weep holes—the small holes in window frames that allow moisture to escape—can often get clogged with dirt. Use a soft, small brush to clear the opening.

☒ Put up a live Christmas tree

For boughs that go beyond the holidays, choose a live tree that you can plant directly in the ground. In colder climates, you'll need to plan ahead by digging a hole before the ground freezes. Since live trees should spend no more than 10 days indoors, buy one close to Christmastime and water daily; before planting, move it to the garage for a day or two so it can acclimate to outdoor temps.



TOH TIP

☐ Protect pets

Festive plants may be beautiful, but many of them can be harmful to pets if ingested. Amaryllis, holly, mistletoe, and poinsettias can lead to vomiting, irritation, erratic behavior, or even death. To keep flora out of reach, place it high up on shelves or install hanging baskets for holiday displays. For a full list of dangerous plants, visit aspc.org.

☐ Banish emerald ash borers

This insect has killed tens of millions of ash trees in 25 states and is often found hitching a ride around the country via firewood. To



help keep it from migrating, make sure that any wood you purchase this season is locally grown and heat-treated. Then monitor your ash trees for signs of the pest, such as wilted leaves and D-shaped exit holes in the bark. For more information, visit stopthebeetle.info.

☐ Up your recycling game

During the holiday season, Americans generate 25 percent more trash than the rest of the year—all that wrapping paper adds up! Help reduce your own home's excess waste by making a few simple changes, such as swaddling gifts in old wallpaper or fabric scraps and reusing shipping and packing materials. If you're gifting electronics, consider coupling them with batteries that can be recharged.



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home solutions

Edited by Michelle Brunner

INSIDE

DIY DECOR

FURNITURE REPAIRS

EXPERT ADVICE

CLEANING HACKS

MORE

Snow people sans snow

You don't need a thick blanket of the fluffy stuff to make this charming pair—just a couple of **snow-white newel posts** and some workshop odds and ends. Here, black knobs stand in for eyes of coal, small trim-head screws form the mouths, and a painted wood dowel makes a perfect carrot nose, when you cut one end at 45°. To make the hat brims, we traced the bottom of a large paint can on a 1×8 and cut it out with a jigsaw. Stacked rounds cut from 2×6 cedar form his hat's crown. Buttons are 1-inch dowels set in recesses made with a paddle bit. The finishing touch: bundling them up in ribbon scarves so they look as ready for the big chill as Frosty and company. But unlike that beloved snowman, these two won't melt when the mercury rises.

A furniture
bun foot
makes the
perfect bonnet
top for our
snow lady.



PHOTO: JOHN GRUEN; STYLING: INGRID LEES



A coat of stain (we used Minwax's Early American) highlights the natural grain of the wood.



Wood-block luminaries

Create a festive village scene with **house-shaped candleholders** made from 4×4 scraps. We cut 6-inch and 8-inch lengths with a miter saw set to a 45° angle and glued two blocks together to form each house. For a “chimney” base, we drilled straight into the mitered cut with a Forstner bit before angling the drill and boring the hole downward into the roof. A coat of stain and architectural details hand-drawn with a metallic paint pen add rustic charm. The finishing touch: LED candles that ensure the homes stay safely lit.

Fast furniture fixes from a pro

Nicks, scratches, loose legs—wood furniture often takes a beating. Here, *TOH* contributing editor Amy Hughes, who restores vintage pieces at her design shop, Salvage Style, in Maplewood, New Jersey, shares a few of her trade secrets.

TO RESTORE WOOD'S LUSTER The No. 1 tool in her fix-up arsenal is a natural polish called Feed-N-Wax by Howard. Says Hughes, “Often all it takes is a couple of coats of this beeswax, orange oil, and carnauba wax formula to bring dull, dried-out wood back to life.”

TO ERASE WATER RINGS A combination of untinted paste wax, such as Briwax, and elbow grease removes white water rings from the surface of most clear-coated wood

furniture. Hughes works the wax into the finish with a soft cloth, then pushes hard to eliminate the air pocket that has developed between the finish and the wood.

TO FIX MINOR SCRATCHES, NICKS, AND FADING Hughes's go-to for these blemishes is a penetrating sealer, such as Restor-A-Finish by Howard. Just rub it in with a lint-free rag—or superfine (0000) steel wool for a more aggressive treatment. It dries quickly and comes in nine shades to match an original furniture finish.

TO REATTACH BROKEN BITS To secure wood carvings, veneer that has lifted, or loose dowel joints, Hughes uses a water-based wood glue, like Titebond. “When a piece requires a precision fix, I put the glue in a syringe,



inject it right where it's needed, and set it with clamps,” she says.

TO BANISH MUSTY SMELLS Hughes defunks drawers and cabinets with an unscented odor absorber, like Nature's Air Sponge, which combines a soap-based gel with activated charcoal. Just place the open tub inside for a week or until smells are neutralized.

Shop owner Amy Hughes, among a few of her restored treasures.

Holiday-lighting know-how

For a spectacular display that's merry and bright—and doesn't blow a fuse—follow these five tips from lighting pros. —SAL VAGLICA



The right holiday lighting can be downright magical—with the flick of a switch, you can transform your home's exterior into a twinkling winter wonderland. To make sure your display is as safe as it is delightful, read on.

1 Measure before you shop. Calculate how many linear feet of string you need by measuring around windows and doors and along the roofline—wherever you're running lights. Once you've tallied the linear feet, check the lighting's package for the length. Determine the distance between the outdoor socket and where the run of lights starts, and use an appropriate length of outdoor-rated extension cord to avoid having lights go straight to the socket.

2 Choose the right bulb. If you like the look of warm white lights with a slight yellow cast, incandescent bulbs are your best bet, especially for smaller jobs, like lighting a wreath or a garland. They're generally less expensive than LEDs, but they have a shorter life span and consume 80 percent more energy. For bigger jobs, go with more-efficient LEDs. They're available in a wide range of styles, from minis and colorful retro-style C7s to larger globes.

The quality of the light varies with LEDs, so look for wording such as "soft white" or "classic white" on the packaging to avoid bulbs with a cool blue undertone.

3 Consider spacing. The distance between individual lights is all over the map. Take a tape measure with you to determine the spacing between lights, and buy sets that come with less than 12 inches between bulbs. Typically, larger bulbs, like

chunky C7s or C9s for the roof, look best when the lights are between 6 and 10 inches apart. Smaller lights or minis should be spaced more tightly to avoid having to wrap a mailbox post or a column multiple times.

4 Don't forget the trees. For conifers, go with this rule of thumb: 100 lights per every vertical foot of tree. And opt for larger bulbs that won't get lost when viewed from the street. For deciduous trees, minis work fine, and you can make quick work of wide trunks with a net of lights. But if the tree is less than 4 feet in circumference, stick with string lights. For shrubs, use mini lights with 25 to 50 lights per set on a green cord—they'll blend in much better than netted lights. Tuck them into shrubs in a random pattern, keeping the strings 4 to 6 inches apart. And wrapping bulbs running between bushes with black electrical tape saves you from having to buy blackout caps.

5 Power up—carefully. LEDs are often spaced closer together than incandescents, and you can string more of them end to end. For that reason, it's a good idea to limit incandescent mini bulbs to 10 strings of 50 lights for one plug. With LEDs, you can go up to nearly 50 strings, each with 70 lights. Don't assume all lights are designed for outdoor use; wrap all connections between strings with electrical tape to keep moisture out. Always plug lights into a covered outlet protected with a ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI)—running cords from inside the house through a window or a mail slot is a fire hazard.



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Tabletop Tannenbaum

Here's a truly **evergreen centerpiece**: This modern take on a festive fir won't wilt, doesn't need watering, and can be stored flat, then hauled out season after season. For this 24-inch-high tree, we cut two sheets of lauan into full-size triangles. Using a jigsaw, we made slots 12 inches long from the top of one triangle and the bottom of the other; this allows the two tree pieces to interlock. We used 1¼-inch and 2-inch Forstner bits to make holes for the ornaments, then drilled tiny holes for threading their wires. A coat of lively green paint and small glass balls provide the trimmings. Now that's what we call a perfect spruce-up for the table.



← Cheery green paint (Behr's Lucky Clover) makes this tree stand out.

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Need-to-know numbers: the dining room

Chances are your dining room sees more action this season than any other time of the year. With family and friends gathered round the table, you'll want to make sure your space measures up. Here, expert advice from Richmond, Virginia-based interior designer Susan Jamieson. Just don't call us if you need to loosen your belt. —KATELIN HILL

Choose the right-size light fixture

An out-of-proportion fixture can throw off an entire room. As a rule, add the length and width of the room in feet for the ideal diameter of the fixture, in inches. So a 20-by-25-foot room calls for a 45-inch fixture. Next, the fixture should be proportionate to the dining table. Make sure your table is at least 1 foot wider than the light on all sides.

30"

Ideal amount of space between the dining table and the bottom of a chandelier

24"

Ideal amount of space per guest around the table to allow for elbow room

36"

Ideal clearance needed behind chairs from the pushed-in position. (Make sure rugs also extend at least 36 inches, to avoid catching on the chair legs.)

How to measure for a medallion

To calculate the ideal diameter of a medallion in inches, divide the square footage of the room by 7. For a 10-by-10-foot room, say, divide 100 by 7. The resulting number, 14, is the appropriate medallion diameter, in inches.

$$\text{SQUARE FOOTAGE} \div 7 = \text{DIAMETER OF CEILING MEDALLION}$$

Bath-cleaning shortcuts

Holidays often mean a full house—and more foot traffic in your bathrooms. Give your lavatories luster with these clever uses for household staples.

—MEGAN BAKER



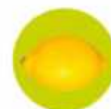
FOR SPOTTY MIRRORS, TRY BLACK TEA. Tannic acid in the tea helps

remove water spots. Pour room-temperature tea into a spray bottle, and wipe with a lint-free cloth.



FOR CLOUDY SHOWER DOORS, TRY DRYER SHEETS.

The fabric-softening sheets contain ingredients that cut through soap scum. Just dampen with water before wiping down glass surfaces.



FOR RUST RINGS, TRY LEMON JUICE.

The fruit's acidity will help dissolve the stains left behind by shaving-cream cans and other metal containers. To prevent future rust buildup, coat the bottom ring of cans with clear nail polish.



FOR DULL FAUCETS, TRY TOOTHPASTE.

The fine abrasives in non-gel toothpastes make them ideal for shining up chrome faucets and fixtures.



FOR STAINS IN THE TUB, TRY SALTED GRAPEFRUIT.

Citric acid cuts through soapy buildup, and salt provides extra scouring power. Just cut a grapefruit in half and load it up with table salt, then get scrubbing. (A lemon will work, too, but a grapefruit's larger size makes it easy to cover more surface area.)

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A hideaway crafts station for \$212

A spare closet gets a fun and functional makeover with the addition of a sliding door and a clever fold-down table



BEFORE

BEFORE The homeowner had removed the closet's wire shelving and bifold doors, but the space still had no real purpose—except as a catchall for clutter.

AFTER The new space allows for spreading out craft projects while working on them, then hiding materials away.

WITHOUT THE RIGHT SETUP, even small projects—like wrapping presents—can take over a room. That's why Karisa Grimstad, of Seattle, needed a workstation with storage for her sewing and craft projects. She had already converted a spare bedroom into a home office, so the underused cedar clothes closet seemed like the perfect spot. First, she primed and painted the interior. Then she turned a cubby storage unit on its side across the bottom of the closet and used hinges to attach a tabletop to the unit. When the table is flipped down, it extends into the room, supported by a removable dowel. When not in use, it swings up flat against the wall to reveal a chalkboard. Old cabinet shelves supported by brackets provide storage overhead. Inspired by a barn-door tutorial online, Karisa built a frame out of pine and inserted a cotton shower curtain as a fabric panel inside. Eye hooks screwed into the top of the door allow it to slide along a galvanized-pipe track, and casters on the bottom make opening and closing easy. But that new door doesn't see a lot of use. Says Karisa, "It's such a cute space, why close the door on it?" —KATELIN HILL



\$4 shelf brackets

\$15 shower curtain



THE PROJECT TALLY

Primed the cedar planking and painted it a bright white using leftover paint.....\$12

Attached a prefab MDF tabletop to an old storage unit with new hinges and hardware.....\$26

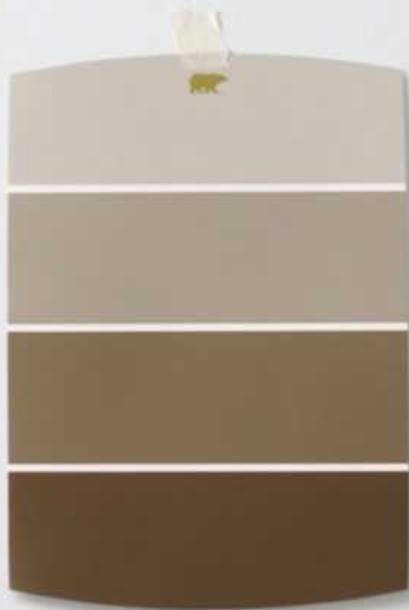
Painted the underside of the tabletop with chalkboard paint she had on hand.....\$0

Hung shelves salvaged from old kitchen cabinetry with new brackets.....\$32

Built a sliding barn-style door using pine 1×2s, galvanized pipe, casters, and a cotton shower curtain.....\$78

Added storage boxes and baskets to corral project materials and craft supplies.....\$64

TOTAL.....\$212



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One big, happy cook space

Annexing the dining room gives this mom of two teenagers an open kitchen where the whole gang can gather

BY KATHRYN O'SHEA-EVANS • PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK LUND



➔ **AS ANY HOME COOK** will tell you, the best meals start from scratch—and often the best kitchens do, too. So when avid cook Janice Gates Kelly bought an early-1900s Tudor in Westchester County, New York, she knew the cramped kitchen would need an overhaul. Together with architect Roz Young, she ended up rethinking the whole first floor, expanding the cook space into the roomy dining room and absorbing the pantry into a new family room. The result: a big open-plan kitchen that's now the official hangout for her and her two teenage

daughters, as well as their friends. “We spend 85 percent of our time in here,” says Janice. That’s partly because she custom-fit the space to their needs, with lots of drawer storage, a peninsula that doubles as a dinner table on weeknights, and a stainless-steel worktable island that she bought as a temporary fix, then fell in love with. “Unlike the marble counters, it’s indestructible, which is a boon with kids,” she says. And so is her pro-style range. “It gets cranked up to 500° every Friday for pizza night, and friends come over. The more people in this kitchen, the better!”



BEFORE

BEFORE The dated cook space was cut up, with the fridge in a separate butler's pantry.

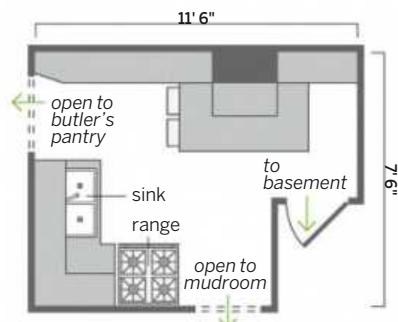
AFTER Homeowner Janice Gates Kelly at work in front of the new kitchen's L-shaped bank of black cabinets topped with white statuary marble. Pendants: West Elm



The fridge wall's gray cabinets incorporate leaded-glass sidelights that the owner bought years ago at an antiques fair, plus a magnetic chalkboard for notes.

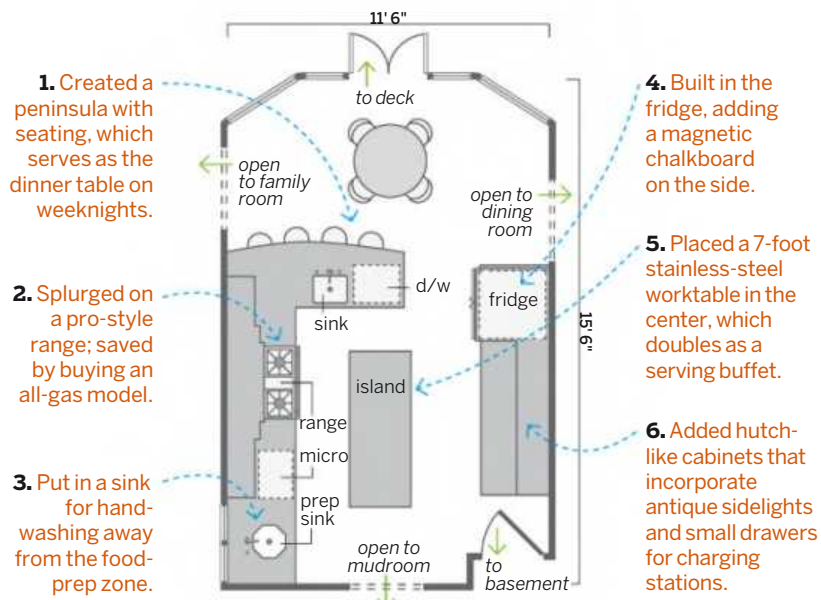
before

The old kitchen was cramped, with a separate pantry that held the fridge.



after

Extending the kitchen into the former dining room and reworking the basement entry allowed for one big, open space.





The new range wall held plumbing for an upstairs bath, so adding the pot filler was an inexpensive upgrade. "It also serves as a focal point, so we didn't need expensive tile above the stove," says Janice.
Range: Thermador

Highlighter-yellow door backs are a nice surprise in the gray cabinets. Wood-tone drawers hold charging stations, one for each family member, so laptops, tablets, and phones are "out of sight, out of mind" at bedtime.



homeowner tip

JANICE GATES KELLY,
WESTCHESTER
COUNTY, N.Y.

"Shop for sinks and faucets in person at high-end plumbing stores, then scour eBay for the same exact ones. I saved hundreds that way!"

The pretty octagonal prep sink was a splurge (even at a warehouse sale) and acts as a hand-washing station for the kids. *Sink: Waterworks*



Glass shelf inserts allow lights to brighten the entire contents of the black china cabinet, which holds the homeowner's Wedgwood collection. The back is lined with wrapping paper in the perfect shade of chartreuse green.

TWO-COLOR KITCHENS

Find more cabinet color combos at thisoldhouse.com/novdec2015

Impress Your Holiday Guests

With a few thoughtful touches and a little creativity, you can transform your bath into an oasis so inviting, your guests may never want to leave!



1. Affix a wall hook and hang luxurious holly berry-hued robes for your guests to wear during their stay (and take home as a parting gift).
Shown above: Delta® Addison® robe hook.

2. Stock your shower with aromatic soaps and soothing scrubbers so guests can unwind after the holiday festivities.

3. Make your own holiday accents to decorate the bathroom. Find the easy DIY instructions at the website below.

4. Holiday prep can be messy, so make cleanup festive and fun with peppermint-scented hand-made soaps and seasonal hand towels.

5. Offer a welcome basket packed with fluffy towels, scented toiletries, and a pair of cozy slippers for overnight guests to step into when exiting the bath.

6. Treat your guests to a spa-like experience by swapping out your showerhead with the easy-to-install Delta In2ition®+H₂Okinetic® 2-in-1 shower.

For more holiday inspiration and DIY projects, visit thisoldhouse.com/deltaholiday.

You can't predict what they'll
get into out there, but you can in here.

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polish
the
jewels
of a
once-
grand
Queen
Anne.”

Tom Silva
TOH general contractor

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restore **original**
windows,
refurbish a
claw-foot tub,
and rebuild the
wraparound
porch of a
historic
1895 home.

PHOTO: CARL TREMBLAY



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Vintage revival

Original details in a Victorian-era bath inspire a retro refresher

BY MEGAN BAKER • PHOTOGRAPHS BY ZACH DeSART

→ **NOT EVERY BATH** is due for a total overhaul—sometimes, all that's needed is a few simple changes. That's what Chuck Jepsen found in the guest bathroom of his 1887 Queen Anne, in Stamford, Connecticut, where several “updates” added over the years—like the 1950s wall-mount sink and the bright-blue paint on the cast-iron tub—dragged down an otherwise well-preserved space. So rather than start from scratch, he opted to add a much-needed shower and embark on a short list of cosmetic fixes to brighten the room without dulling the period feel.

Since the existing 125-year-old subway and hex tile required little more than a deep scrub, Chuck kept it all intact. He moved the toilet to make room for a spacious shower lined with new subway tiles that match the originals, and swapped the wall-mount sink for an authentic vintage pedestal model salvaged from another bath in the house. And, of course, the room got new paint throughout: on the walls, the trim, and even the tub. “I love that I was able to preserve so many of the original features,” says Chuck. “And the new pieces look right at home with all the old ones.”



BEFORE Although some vintage elements remained, later upgrades—like a wall-mount sink and a bright-painted tub—created a dated look.

AFTER A stately pedestal sink complements the home's period finishes, including original hex-tile floors and subway-tile walls.



BEFORE

• before + after: **bath**



Covering the antique tub's old cobalt-painted exterior with a coat of metallic gray restores the vintage look of the room. Most of the original subway tiles were intact, so rather than replace them, Chuck sought out matching pieces for patch jobs. Paint: Benjamin Moore's Ashland Slate (wall) and Baltic Gray (door and casings). Robe hook: Delta

MORE EASY UPGRADES

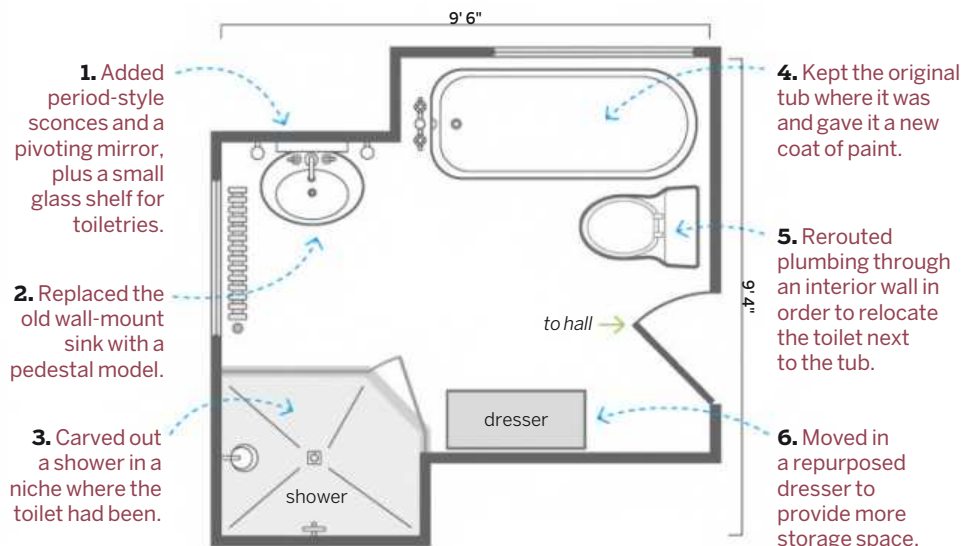
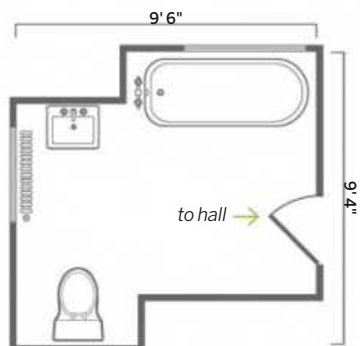
Find additional ideas for refreshing your bath at thisoldhouse.com/novdec2015

after

Moving the toilet made space for a glass-doored shower, which sits across from a newly installed vintage pedestal sink.

before

Without a shower, the bath lacked function—and dated fixtures dragged it down.





The frameless glass shower practically disappears into the room. Marble hex tile on the shower floor echoes the ceramic hex in the rest of the bath without trying to be an exact match.

Its polished-nickel finish, curved spout, and lever handles help the transitional faucet set jibe with the salvaged sink. *Faucet: Delta*



An antique fluted-pedestal sink offers enough deck space for a couple of essentials; the glass shelf above adds a resting spot for other oft-used necessities. Frosted-glass sconces and a pivoting mirror complete the period look. *Sconces, mirror, shelf, and soap dish: Restoration Hardware*



homeowner tip

CHUCK JEPSEN,
STAMFORD, CONN.

“Using gray paint on the door and casings helps the white tile look brighter.”

The gooseneck rain showerhead is in keeping with classic Victorian-style fixtures and matches the pedestal sink’s new faucet.

Showerhead: Delta



Smartened up

An energetic paint scheme and streamlined wire management make for a high-functioning home office

BY MARY KELLY SELOVER • PHOTOGRAPHS BY HELEN NORMAN



→ **HOME OFFICES**, like their occupants, thrive on order. When Coleen and Randy Gallagher moved into their 1987 Federal-style brick home, in Oakton, Virginia, they were pleased it had a ready-made home office. The space's built-in cabinetry, abundant natural light, and handsome wainscoting would serve Randy, a self-employed systems engineer and a captain in the Navy Reserve, well. But its lackluster decor and mess of wires cried out for attention.

Working with designer Rachel Bauer and carpenter Tim Bowers, Coleen first devised

a plan to tuck the wiring out of sight. Bowers drilled a small hole in the side of the built-in to feed the Internet cable into, then added holes in two concealed shelves to thread the router/modem and printer wires through. A banker's desk with deep drawers, fitted with a power strip that plugs into a floor outlet, anchors the work area. Teal paint and light-blue wallpaper make the room snap to attention while keeping it serene. "My only problem now is getting our three sons out of there when Randy's home," Coleen says. "After school, they want to hang there, too!"



BEFORE

BEFORE Tangles of wires and dark walls hindered productivity.

AFTER Concealed cables, a desk with a built-in power strip, and a blue-and-brown color scheme tidy—and brighten—the space. Paint: Benjamin Moore's Caribbean Teal (woodwork)

STYLING: MARIELLEN MELKER



Tailored valances hide blinds that reduce computer-screen glare. The wool rug's muted blues and browns pull together the colors of the furniture, wallpaper, and paint. *Wallpaper: Thibaut. Rug: Surya*

Classically inspired dentil molding and Greek-key trim on the valances pay tribute to the home's Federal style. *Fabric and trim: Fabricut*



HOME OFFICE HOW-TOS

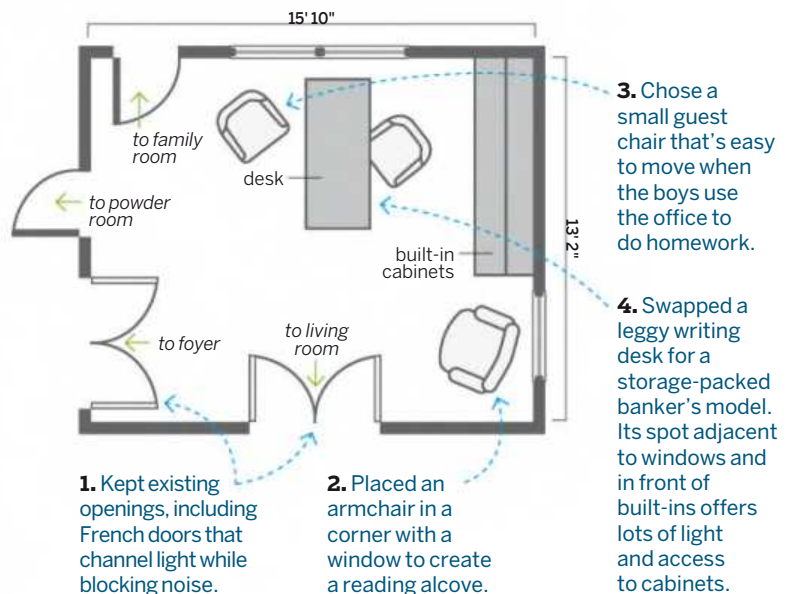
For all the basics on building a fully outfitted workspace, go to thisoldhouse.com/novdec2015



The Internet cable disappears into a hole drilled into the side of the cabinet, where it connects to a wireless router behind doors. Also hidden: the outlet for the concealed printer. An armchair and lamp by a window allow reading day and night.

after

Built-ins and a parallel desk carve out the work zone in a 208-square-foot office with multiple doorways.



Warm winter entry

Add a festive, seasonal touch with soft paint hues, real greenery, and a perch with patina BY KATHRYN O'SHEA-EVANS • PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK LUND

➔ **AMID ALL THE** frazzle-dazzle of the holidays, it can be nice to come home to a house that's as serene as a woodland glade—on the outside, anyway. Take this porch, which is decked with all the accoutrements of the season, from a simple magnolia-leaf wreath casually tied with a golden bow to a free-flowing garland of greens. Sage shingle siding, sky-blue beadboard overhead, and a russet door wrap the space in softness. A well-loved bench, a simple striped doormat, and a pair of bright-orange muck boots keep the scene down-to-earth. Here are some ideas for bringing the same homey feel to your place.

calm colors

Subdued paint shades drawn from nature make for a handsome backdrop that lets porch decorations shine. Cheyenne Green (siding), Scenic Drive (ceiling), and Audubon Russet (door); benjaminmoore.com for stores



silver-dollar garland

A real eucalyptus garland is festive without being holiday-specific—and ushers guests in with a lovely, enlivening scent. 10-foot swag, \$130; fiftyflowers.com



PHOTOS: (GARLAND, BASKET, BOOTS, WREATH, TOPIARIES, TEXTILES, PAINT DABS) TED MORRISON; PRODUCED BY TISHA LEUNG; STYLING: ANNA MOLVIK



get this look for less



wall-hung basket

This handwoven vine number could hold the mail or celebrate the season with a delivery of evergreen boughs. \$20; worldmarket.com



colorful boots

Rubber rain boots get a traffic-stopping upgrade in orange; kept on the porch, they'll brighten the drizzliest days. \$30; walmart.com

French flower bucket

Stash umbrellas in this version of the classic shape—or play up its coppery hue with some red-orange berries, like bittersweet. \$12; save-on-crafts.com



earthy textiles

Ward off the winter chill with thick fabrics: a brown-and-white striped polypropylene mat cushions the multicolor-slate floor; a fringed knit throw softens the bench back. 2-by-3-foot mat, \$29; outlet.annieselke.com. Acrylic blanket, \$53; overstock.com



storage bench

The homeowner found hers at a yard sale; we like this solid cedar one, and would stain it cranberry red to let the beauty of the wood shine through. \$175; wayfair.com



boxwood topiaries

These preserved orbs set atop willow stems bring the feeling of a well-tended garden right to the front door. \$65 and \$25; jamaligarden.com

DIY

magnolia-leaf wreath

The leathery emerald-and-nut-brown leaves of the magnolia tree make for elegant, long-lasting door decor. We bought two hulking branches, let a florist's oasis wreath soak in water, then pulled off the leaves and inserted them, alternating green and brown sides up. When it's done, champagne-colored ribbon simply tied provides a finishing touch. Just \$20 (branches) and \$15 (wreath), at a local flower market. 🍀



Stencil an accent wall

A bold pattern on just one wall can anchor focal-point furniture

BY DEBORAH BALDWIN • PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAUREY W. GLENN AND ROBBIE CAPONETTO



With a delicate design, “underload” your foam roller to avoid bleeding.

→ **A LOT OF PEOPLE LOVE** the way wallpaper can warm up a bedroom but balk at the thought of installing it. In giving this space a boost, interior designers Paige Sumblin Schnell and Anna Kay Porch decided to use a stencil instead, and to balance the lively pattern by leaving three walls white. “We wanted to bring in more color and pattern, but without overwhelming the room,” Schnell says. Her design, which plays off the bed linens, is a loose takeoff on the quatrefoil—a rose-like design whose popularity spread from Oriental rugs and Gothic tracery to contemporary tile. (Fittingly, Schnell named her Rosemary Beach, Florida, firm Tracery Interiors.) The designers reinforced the color scheme with

orangey-red and clean white paint. Pale-neutral accessories, a pickled-pine ceiling, and a rustic bench add an earthy counterpoint, while the slightly ragged edges of the loops and lines reinforce the handcrafted nature of decorative painting.

To produce the stencil—a quatrefoil about 21 inches wide atop a starburst—Schnell turned to Chad Martin, a designer near Birmingham, Alabama, who cut it out of Mylar (available by special order, \$55; thegbrand.com). Working on this project clearly helped convert Martin to the decorative-painting cause. “I’ve taken down old wallpaper, and it’s not fun,” he says. “With a stencil, if you get tired of it later on you can just paint over it.” ■



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The case for moody neutrals

Deep, rich, mercurial colors flatter whatever is set in front of them, as interior designer Barbara Westbrook details in her new book

BY KATHRYN KELLER

→ THE TRANSFORMERS.

That's how Atlanta interior designer Barbara Westbrook refers to color and paint. "There's no easier or more affordable way to change a space or create a mood," she points out in her new tome, *Gracious Rooms*. The proof is in the pictures. Olive greens, café au lait taupes, bark-like brown-grays, dark chocolates—she wraps rooms in such nature-inspired shades for an effect both relaxing and elegant. And as often as not, the same color covers walls, casings, paneling, and built-ins. "Painting trimwork a contrasting color tends to chop up a room," she explains. "Covering it all in the same color lends a space some drama." Here, a few qualities that these velvety shades all share.

1. they're soothing

"I find rich, warm neutral colors comforting," says Westbrook. While she normally keeps a bathroom pale or white, she says the one shown here, in a 1930s stone house, "called for something different." A quietly luxurious shade of taupe filled the bill. Covering the walls and all the woodwork in the space, the color is an invitation to relax. *Paint: Pratt & Lambert's Putty*



Gracious Rooms (Rizzoli, 2015), by Barbara Westbrook, is available at independent booksellers and on amazon.com.





2. they can be dramatic

Westbrook likes to go deep and dark in the dining room, since it's most often used at night. "I want you to feel embraced when you walk in," she says. The gray-brown shade on these walls is one of her favorites. To balance it, she lightened up the chairs, carpet, shades, and artwork. *Paint: Pratt & Lambert's Anubis*

pro advice BARBARA WESTBROOK, WESTBROOK INTERIORS, ATLANTA

"People, furniture, flowers, and artwork all look great against these colors. They create a lovely backdrop for whatever else is going on."

3. they add warmth

A kitchen naturally has a lot of hard surfaces—in this case, a stainless-steel range and slab marble countertops and backsplashes. A true warm gray on the cabinets—and on the crown molding ringing the room—helps soften those elements while unifying the space and complementing the wood floor, door, and accessories. *Paint: Benjamin Moore's Galveston Gray* 🏠



Updating a bland ranch

One relic of the postwar building boom gets a handsome new cottage look, thanks to an eye-catching gable, an arched portico, and stone accents

BY KATHRYN O'SHEA-EVANS • ILLUSTRATION BY DRAWGATE INC.



BEFORE

“PLEASE HELP US recapture the optimism!” says Christy Kronberg of this once modern, now dated 1954 ranch, in Athens, Ohio, which she shares with her husband, Stephen Ragg, and their two kids. To give the facade some much-needed curb appeal, we turned to Cincinnati architect Matthew Evans.

“This house is flat, and the attached garage that almost matches its size isn’t doing it any favors,” Evans says, noting that it was likely a later addition. The first thing he’d do: install two separate garage doors to break it up. Adding a gable over the entry would also help rebalance the long facade. “For \$5,000 or less, it would add so much aesthetically,” Evans says. An arch-topped portico and stone cladding on the porch posts, chimney, and garage help ground the house and give it dimension. New double-hungs add sorely needed light. Says Christy: “These changes really give it a warm, welcoming look.”

WANT A PHOTOSHOP REDO?

Send snapshots to redo@thisoldhouse.com



A gable set into the existing roof helps break up the house's long, horizontal facade.



finishing touches

Upgrade a cottage-style exterior with a mix of classic accents and updated finds.



entry set

A traditional thumb-latch door handle in forged brass with an oil-rubbed-bronze finish is a handsome hardware choice. House of Antique Hardware; \$393



window box

Draw the eye where you want it with a flower-filled window box; this sturdy fiberglass version weathers all storms. Hooks and Lattice; \$120



wall sconce

The horizontal lines of this modern frosted-glass, oil-rubbed-bronze fixture echo the lines of the house. Lamps Plus; \$150



door

Never underestimate the power of a solidly built Douglas fir entry door to make a great first impression. Simpson Co.; from \$700



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How to build a kids' bookcase

Use oak stair treads and pine boards to create right-size shelves that keep books and toys within easy reach of small hands

BY SAL VAGLICA • PHOTOGRAPHS BY KOLIN SMITH

COST \$184

TIME Two days

DIFFICULTY Easy. Squaring the dividers to the shelves is the only tricky part.



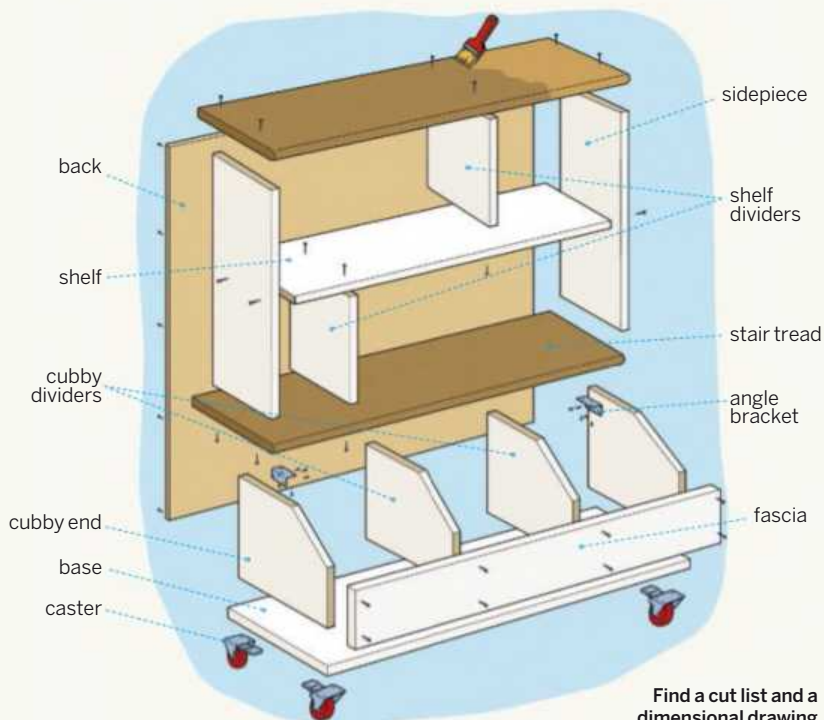
➔ **THE BEST WAY TO ENCOURAGE YOUNGSTERS** to take out and return their own books and toys? Make a creative case that speaks to them at their own level. We scaled ours so the highest shelf is about 24 inches above the floor—perfect for the average 3-year-old, yet useful enough to keep up with her needs as she grows. Wide, deep shelves accommodate a range of books or craft supplies, low-slung cubbies corral toys, and the whole thing rolls on wheels to make rearranging the furniture easier. Follow along as *This Old House* senior technical editor Mark Powers uses basic home-center parts to make a custom storage solution that will inspire kids to tidy up. Maybe.

Decorative shelving: oak stair treads, \$28 each. Casters: Everbilt 3-inch polyurethane locking casters, \$8 each. Both, homedepot.com

DAY-TO-DAY TIMELINE

SATURDAY Build the cabinet and cubbies (Steps 1–3).

SUNDAY Join the two halves and paint the back (Steps 4–5).



Finished dimensions:
36"W × 11¼"D × 39¾"H

Find a cut list and a
dimensional drawing
at thisoldhouse.com/novdec2015.

TOOLS

- > tape measure
- > pencil
- > circular saw
- > bar clamps
- > straightedge
- > router with a ¼-inch straight bit
- > combination square
- > drill/driver
- > rafter square
- > wrench

MATERIALS

- > 1×12 pine board Get three 6-footers.
- > 1×6 pine board Get one 3-footer.
- > 1×18 pine edge-glued panel Get one 4-footer.
- > 1-by-11½-inch oak stair treads Special-order two at 36 inches long.
- > 2×4 lauan panel
- > 1½-inch trim-head screws Get a box.
- > 7⁄16-inch pan-head screws Get a box.
- > wood stain
- > primer and paint
- > construction adhesive
- > 2-by-6-inch angle brackets Get two.
- > painter's tape
- > 3-inch polyurethane locking casters Get four.
- > ¼-by-1-inch carriage bolts, lock washers, and nuts Get 16 of each.
- > wood filler



A



B

1 Prep the parts

A] Size the parts. Use a circular saw to rip and cut the pine boards to final dimensions according to the cut list at thisoldhouse.com/novdec2015.

B] Rabbet the edges. The sides of the cabinet are grooved along the rear edges to accept the backing. To cut the rabbets, fit a trim router with a ¼-inch straight cutting bit and adjust it with ⅜ inch extending below the base. Clamp a sidepiece to the work surface and set a straightedge so that the router cuts a ¼-inch-wide L-shaped channel. Starting at the corner, push the router forward along the right side of the straightedge so that the clockwise-spinning bit bites into the wood. Rabbet cubby ends, too.

2 Build the upper cabinet

A] Mark the treads. Use a combination square to mark lines 1 inch in from each end of the stair treads, on both faces, to indicate where to screw them to the sides of the bookcase. Drill two pilot holes on the line, each one an inch or so from the long edges of the board; be sure to go through the best face of the top tread and the hidden face of the bottom one. Stain the treads, prime and paint the pine parts, then let everything dry.

B] Attach the sides. Stand the top tread on edge with its bullnose up and slip a scrap piece of backing beneath it. Add a bead of construction adhesive to the end grain of a sidepiece. Then bring that sidepiece perpendicular to the tread and use a scrap of 1× as a spacer to inset it from the end of the tread. Now screw through the pilot holes in the tread and into the top edge of the sidepiece with 1½-inch trim-head screws. Repeat on the other side. Attach the bottom tread, screwing up through it and into the bottom edges of the sidepieces.

C] Add the shelf and dividers. Slip the center shelf between the sides, use the shelf dividers to set its position at one end, then screw through the sidepiece and into the edge of the shelf with the trim-head screws, as shown. Reset the dividers at the other end and screw it in place. Now position the shelf dividers with their front edges flush with that of the center shelf, then screw through the shelf and into the dividers. To attach the dividers' opposite ends, drill pilot holes through the treads and secure the dividers with the trim-head screws, using a rafter square to keep them perpendicular to the treads. Set the upper cabinet aside.



TIP To make squaring the cubby dividers easier, screw the fascia to the ends first to prevent racking.



3 Make the cubbies

A] Add the ends. Rest the base for the cubbies on the work surface. Position a rabbeted cubby end with its front edge flush with that of the base. Screw through the end and into the edge of the base, as shown, with the trim-head screws. Attach the opposite cubby end. Now split the base into thirds, marking the locations of the two dividers, and attach them by screwing through the underside of the base.

B] Square the cubbies. Position the fascia against the front edges of the cubby ends and dividers; drive trim-head screws through it and into the end edges, then the divider edges. Use a rafter square, as shown, to square up each divider before screwing it in place.

4 Join cabinet to cubbies

A] Attach the brackets. Center an angle bracket on the inside face of one cubby end and hold it flush with the piece's top edge. Fasten it with $\frac{7}{16}$ -inch pan-head screws, as shown, then repeat on the other end.

B] Mark the upper cabinet. Center the upper cabinet on the base so the lower tread has a $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch overhang on each end, using your 1× scrap to check. Move the upper cabinet forward so the rear of the tread is flush with the rabbeted edge you made. Reach through the back of the cubbies and drive pan-head screws through the bracket and into the underside of the lower tread, as shown—no pilot holes required. Repeat on the other side.



5 Add the finishing touches

A] Paint the back. Measure the opening of the back, then cut the lauan to fit. Use painter's tape to temporarily hold the back in place between the rabbeted edges. Use a pencil to outline the rectangles that get the accent color, as shown. Paint the accent color, paint the rest of the back white, then let everything dry.

B] Attach the back. Tip the cabinet on its face and drop the painted back in place. Drive pan-head screws into each corner and then several between them, along all four edges.

C] Add the casters. Hold a caster in position on a corner and mark the mounting holes. Drill $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-diameter holes through the underside of the base. Attach the caster with carriage bolts, lock washers, and nuts, using a wrench, as shown. Repeat the process for the remaining casters, then turn the bookcase right-side up. Add wood filler to screw holes and give the bookcase a final coat of paint. ■



SEE HOW IT'S DONE

To watch an instructional video of this project, go to thisoldhouse.com/novdec2015

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SHAI GIL FOTOGGRAPHY

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Our first built-from-the-ground-up **Idea House** puts a fresh spin on a classic American house style. A **storybook cottage** with a steeply pitched roof, it combines historical architectural details with **modern amenities**. An open floor plan, a **flexible layout**, and a wraparound porch maximize space indoors and out for a home that's **functional, adaptable**, and full of appeal. To take a tour, turn the page.

The facade's tapered porch columns on stone piers, stone-clad foundation walls, and beefy brackets are classic Craftsman touches. The peaked metal roof updates the traditional form, as does the vibrant paint color (Olympic's Chinese Porcelain).

BY LINDA SHERBERT • PHOTOGRAPHS BY DEBORAH WHITLAW LLEWELLYN

How exactly

does this small house live large? The wide-open ground floor embraces living, dining, and kitchen areas. It also hosts one of two master suites, to allow for a family's changing needs or to welcome guests. Upstairs, the main master suite, a third bedroom, and a hall bath lead to a top-story sleeping loft tucked beneath the rafters. Clever storage and seating built-ins throughout tap every extra sliver of space. One reason we chose to build our Idea House at Cloudland Station, a *Southern Living* Inspired Community in Chickamauga, Georgia (see sidebar, page 61), is the obvious craftsmanship of the homes, which are based on traditional turn-of-the-century designs. We believe this cottage offers inspiration and accessible ideas that you can apply to your own home, whether you're making modest upgrades, embarking on a major remodel, or building from scratch.



TOH IDEA HOUSE 2015

open-plan living

1. Come on in! No space is wasted on an entryway in the family room, where shiplap paneling and decorative red-cedar beams set the rustic cottage tone. Atlanta interior designer Yvonne McFadden chose tailored seating and a coffee table on casters that glides over a supersize ottoman to free up floor space.
2. The dining area's handcrafted trestle table bridges living and kitchen spaces. Nearby, French doors lead to the side section of the wraparound porch.
3. The raised hearth's flagstone slab offers extra seating, as do benches built on either side that also store firewood. Window sashes are painted charcoal to disappear, putting the vistas just outside in focus.
4. McFadden enlivened the kitchen with blue cabinets and designed a pendant with glass globes found at an antiques warehouse. Marble lines the counters; shiplap wraps the range hood. Reclaimed chestnut—with 10 coats of food-safe butcher-block oil—tops the island.



WALLS
QUILL
Olympic



KITCHEN CABINETS
CASTILE
Olympic

THESE PAGES

BEAMS: Western Red Cedar
Lumber Association
DRAPES, ROMAN SHADES,
BASKETS: The Company Store
CUSTOM DINING TABLE:
Sonny Whitt
CUSTOM CABINETRY,
COUNTERTOPS: Harris
Custom Cabinetry
FAUCET: Moen
DISHWARE: The Homer
Laughlin China Company
ART: UGallery



2



“Be generous with space in the areas where family, visiting kids, and friends gather. Make the hearth count. Open up the downstairs floor with living, dining, and kitchen areas that connect as one.”

— JOHN TATUM,
DEVELOPER,
CLOUDLAND STATION



3



4

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flexible spaces

5. The first-floor master bedroom hosts guests—or homeowners who prefer to avoid stairs. Three-over-one windows face the front porch, while small casements over the bed allow a cross breeze.

6. Seven cabinets, some floor-to-ceiling, keep the compact laundry room tidy. A counter for folding spans the washer and dryer. The sink can serve as a hand-washing and hand-laundering station or a place for potted plants.

7. A thoughtful mix of cabinets, drawers, and hooks organizes inhabitants of all ages and sizes. The built-in bench, open below, handles just-shed shoes.



5



6



BEDROOM WALLS
CACTUS BLOSSOM M
Olympic



MUDROOM CABINETS
STORMY WEATHER
Olympic

THIS PAGE

BEDDING, RUGS, BAGS,
PET ACCESSORIES: **The Company Store**
BEDROOM FLOOR LAMP:
MUDROOM CEILING LIGHT:
Lamps Plus

TABLE LAMPS, DRAPE
AND PILLOW FABRIC:
Schumacher
CUSTOM DRAPES: **Home Accent Inc.**
FAUCET, SINK: **Moen**
ART: **UGallery**



7

Built-in solutions

Try these tricks for putting every square foot of a house to good use.

► **STORAGE** Choose cabinets and shelves instead of furniture in tight spaces. Even shallow units, such as these mudroom cabinets, can store a lot.

► **ALCOVES AND NICHES** Run built-ins all the way up to the ceiling or install in a corner to take advantage of otherwise overlooked space. The top cabinet in the laundry room holds bulk items.

► **STRUCTURAL DIVIDERS** Use built-ins to mask—or play up—structural features. In the second-floor master bath (see page 56), a shelf and a mirror installed between partition walls create a grooming area.



MASTER BEDROOM WALLS
CORNMEAL
Olympic



MASTER BATH WALLS
QUILL
Olympic

THIS PAGE
BED, BEDDING, RUG, ROBE,
TOWELS, ACCESSORIES: **The**
Company Store

ART: **UGallery**
FAUCET, HOOKS, TOWEL BARS:
Moen
TILE: **TileBar**



TOH IDEA HOUSE 2015

exposed beams

8. Tucked under the front gable, the upstairs master bedroom gains height—and interest—by exposing the structure overhead, all painted rough-sawn white pine. Showing off beams and rafters throughout the cottage lends a lofty feel.

9. Partition walls create natural divisions for various areas in the bath, including an alcove for a vanity table, whose apron is made from two pieces of a salvaged door. Wall-mount faucets make it easy to clean the marble counter with a swipe. The sink cabinet has a warm, gray-washed finish for a reclaimed-wood look.

10. The shower is lined with a sophisticated marble mosaic tile befitting a master bath. A triangular bench tucks discreetly in the corner. A robe hook on the wall beside the shower provides easy access to robes and clothes after bathing.

“Rough-sawn timber and exposed beams change the feeling of a room. They make you more conscious of the architecture that’s all around you.”

—DAVID MARTIN,
GENERAL CONTRACTOR



11

TOH IDEA HOUSE 2015

varied textures

11. For this second-floor bedroom, carpenter Sonny Whitt built bunk beds from rough-sawn 4×6 white-pine rafters, distressed the wood with hand tools and chains, then applied a diluted ebony stain. The beds, attached to colorfully painted pine planking that wraps the head and side, are anchored to the walls.

12. Shiplap walls continue in the upstairs hall. Just outside the bunk room, a small laptop desk takes advantage of a natural alcove, with a small window above. Next to it, a recess lined with sisal wallpaper and finished with a shelf offers a place to spotlight art.

13. A stenciled design of turquoise arrows above the wainscot of black penny-round tile is a practical alternative to wallpaper in the upstairs hall bath.

THIS PAGE

BEDDING, END TABLE, TABLE
LAMP, BASKETS, DESK CHAIR,
SHOWER CURTAIN, TOWELS,
ROBE, BATH ACCESSORIES:
The Company Store

BUNK BEDS: Sonny Whitt
ART: UGallery
FAUCET: Moen
TILE: TileBar
STENCIL: Cutting Edge
Stencils



12

“Combining different textures—like wood, fabric, and tile—adds depth and character, which help to warm up a room.”

—YVONNE McFADDEN, INTERIOR DESIGNER



13

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14

TOH IDEA HOUSE 2015

tucked-in areas

14. The loft offers a kids' play space at one end, twin beds at the other. The roof structure allows 7 feet 2 inches of clearance at its highest point. Egress windows are locked when kids are present. Clothes reside in cabinets built into the crawl space.

15. The top floor is accessed via a ladder-step stairway of reclaimed barn wood. To accommodate the steep pitch of the staircase, the steps are 8 inches deep. A sliding barn door on the hall bath eliminates a space-hogging door swing.

16. In the play area, foot-deep built-in shelves fit into the space between the first sets of rafters. A wood bench supplements the cushion seating.

“Don’t overlook the nooks and crannies. A lot can be done when they are a focus. They tend to create the inner charm and warmth of a cottage.”

—JOHN TATUM, DEVELOPER, CLOUDLAND STATION



15



16



SLEEPING LOFT
CEILING
GONE BANANAS
Olympic

THIS PAGE
BEDDING, CHAIR, HAMPER,
POUFS, BASKETS, TOYS:
The Company Store
ART: **UGallery**
CUSTOM BUILT-INS, BEDS,
STAIRCASE: **Sonny Whitt**



A



B



C

Compact systems

Maximize function while conserving space with these technological advancements.

► HOME SECURITY

(A) SimpliSafe's security system operates from a wireless keypad, a smartphone, or a key-chain remote. The 11-inch-tall base controls up to 41 sensors.

► **HVAC** (B) Low-profile flexible ducts for Unico's high-velocity forced-air system are less than one-third the size of typical models.

► TANKLESS WATER HEATER

(C) The Energy Star-rated Rinnai water heater can be wall-mounted in a closet and uses up to 40 percent less energy than a standard tank.



SIDING
CHINESE PORCELAIN
Olympic



FRONT DOOR
ASPARAGUS
Olympic

THIS PAGE

FLOOR, RAILINGS: Western Red Cedar Lumber Association
SCONCES, PENDANTS: Lamps Plus
PLANTS, LANDSCAPING: Monrovia
WIRE SIDE TABLES: The Company Store
DISHES: The Homer Laughlin China Company
PLANTERS, BENCH: Campania International
METAL ROOFING: GreenForm
PERGOLA: The Home Depot and Design Craft Millworks
GRILL: Southern Hearth and Patio

TOH IDEA HOUSE 2015

outdoor rooms

17. The porch, a generous 10 feet deep on two sides, accommodates multiple seating areas to extend living space. McFadden chose furniture, including a pair of all-weather wicker sofas, to suit family life as well as entertaining. The carpenter-built cedar coffee-table top hosts cocktails or cards with ease. Pendant lights allow conversation into the evening. The green custom front door brightens the shaded area.

18. Landscape designer Kate Karam added a small garden in the space connecting the front and back yards. A faux-bois bench, with a matching cast-stone planter, offers a quiet rest spot. A garnet Japanese maple shares the plot with Little Lime hydrangeas and Japanese painted ferns.

19. Sheltered by a 10-by-12-foot pergola, a ceramic grill and smoker sit on the perimeter of the paver patio so that smoke drafts away from diners.

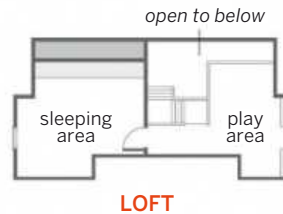
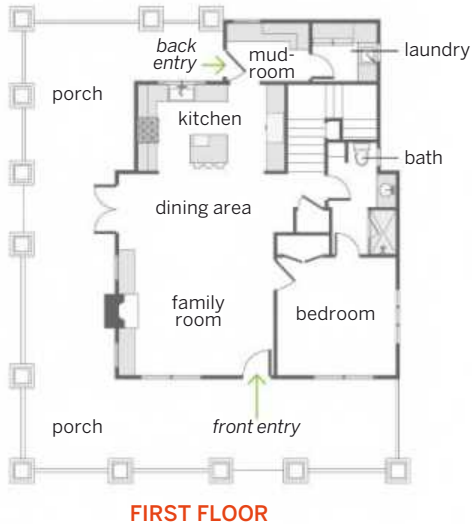


MORE IDEAS!

Tour all the rooms—indoors and out—of the TOH 2015 Idea House. Go to thisoldhouse.com/ideahouse2015 for additional photos.

floor plans

The 1,998-square-foot house gains added living space from a 10-foot-deep porch that accesses family and dining rooms on the open-plan first floor. En suite master bedrooms on the first and second floors, plus another upstairs bedroom and a top-floor loft, sleep up to eight.



BUY THE PLANS To order complete house plans for the TOH 2015 Idea House, go to southernlivinghouseplans.com and enter Plan Number 1873.

About Cloudland Station

► The TOH 2015 Idea House is located in Cloudland Station, a 450-acre development of historically inspired houses in Chickamauga, Georgia, about 2 hours northwest of Atlanta. The community offers a village-like setting with recreational facilities for residents, including a swimming hole, a tree house, and, for special events, a farmhouse and a rustic barn. For more information, go to cloudlandstation.com.

FLOOR PLANS: IAN WOPPOLE



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TOH 2015 IDEA HOUSE BUILDING TEAM

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designer*

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developer of
Cloudland Station
cloudlandstation.com

David Martin

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nowlanddesign.com

Sonny Whitt

Finish carpenter

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A 1920s
farmhouse
gets a much-
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losing its
evolved-
over-time
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By **Deborah Baldwin**

Photographs by **John Gruen**

Produced by **Tisha Leung**

Styling by **Ingrid Leess**



The house's gentle update included new living room built-ins and crown molding. Vintage furnishings, waxed floorboards, and a muted palette add to the coziness. *Paint: Farrow & Ball's French Gray (walls and trim)*





If your idea of purgatory

is spending Saturday morning staring at 2,317 paint chips—alongside your equally baffled partner—you may find it hard to believe that some couples actually enjoy this sort of thing. They may even be good at it.

“We’d meet on-site and lay out our ideas, and we were, of course, talking about it all the time,” says Rafe Churchill, referring to the enviably painless, eye-to-eye redo process of the Sharon, Connecticut, farmhouse that he and his wife, interior designer Heide Hendricks, now call home. “We have been together almost 20 years and almost always have been aligned in our aesthetic preferences.”

Weathering redos of their previous homes has, if anything, cemented these bonds. “We did a loft together in Brooklyn and two lakeside cottages, and we designed and built a house nearby when we first moved here,” says Rafe, ticking off four life-consuming projects as if they’d been no harder than whitewashing a picket fence.

It helps that one half of this team was born into a family that knows its way around a lumberyard. Rafe, a third-generation master builder turned architectural designer (brother Seth runs Churchill Building Company, in nearby Salisbury), stepped easily into the role of GC and space planner, freeing Heide to focus on paint and textiles. “Though he does like to weigh in on colors—and on lighting and finishes!” she says tolerantly.

The couple found their dream fixer-upper a few years ago, when their kids were ages 4 and 7. Situated on a rise insulated in back by a town land trust, the 1929 center-hall Colonial Revival was empty and priced to sell. They liked the very things that had driven other potential buyers away, from the galley kitchen and randomly added side porches to the ancient plaster walls and timeworn spaces. Old houses like this have



TOP LEFT: The 1929 farmhouse sits just above the road, so the primary entrance and outdoor living space are out back. **ABOVE:** The owners revived the kitchen’s spirits with vintage-look custom cabinets painted in a warm neutral, a worktable island, and a band of bold blue-gray paint. **RIGHT:** Open pantry shelves keep supplies handy. *Paint: Farrow & Ball’s Shaded White and Down Pipe (walls) and Hardwick White (cabinets and trim). Rug: Elizabeth Eakins*





“settled into the landscape,” Rafe says approvingly.

Years of working in this neck of Connecticut, known for its rolling hills and above-average household incomes, had also deepened his appreciation of the coveted imperfections that signal authentic period style. “As soon as you change ceiling heights and make the windows line up perfectly, that’s when you lose verisimilitude,” Rafe says of those who don’t know when it’s best to leave things alone. “It’s the oddities in the composition of the windows and the details that are the most convincing.”

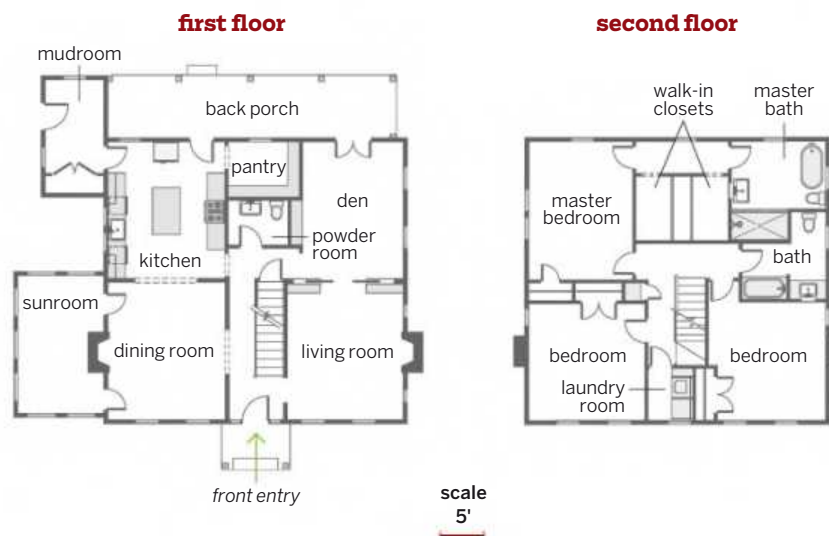
Think of it as the difference between a Calvin Klein shirt hot off the runway and a Brooks Brothers oxford that’s frayed around the cuffs. “A lot of people talk about a nice, simple farmhouse, but very few people ever end up with that,” Rafe says. “Part of the reason is they fall into a formulaic approach in the kitchen and bathrooms, with lots of tile and cabinetry and a built-in refrigerator, and the next thing you know, the farmhouse you fell in love with isn’t recognizable.”

Though eager to make the house more family-functional, the couple also wanted to preserve its style. They didn’t even consider one of those kitchens that’s so big, it leaves no place to hide; instead, they would preserve existing spaces and, bucking trends, gather for meals in that thing called the dining room.

The refrigerator would be allowed to be a refrigerator, standing alone against its own wall. The mudroom might hop to a new spot, but it would still be a place where you kick off your boots after feeding the chickens, weeding

floor plans

The three-story house, about 2,900 square feet including the new back porch, shed two side porches in favor of a mudroom and a sunroom. A full bath on the first floor became a powder room and a pantry. The opening between the kitchen and the dining room was widened about 4 feet to improve traffic flow; pocket doors between the den and the living room were added to preserve sight lines while blocking out the sound of the TV. On the second floor, five bedrooms and a shared bath became two bedrooms, a new hall bath, and a master suite. The finished attic, not shown, holds a playroom and a guest room.





the flower beds, and gathering firewood. “You have to ask yourself, What do you really need?” says Heide. “Our approach was, How little can we do?”

A better way to put it might be, How little can we do that you would actually notice? Because the house really did need work. Pipes, wiring, and appliances would have to be replaced and insulation added, along with a new boiler and radiators, and central air on the first floor. With five small bedrooms and a single bath, the second floor would need some rearranging. And new finishes were called for throughout: Photos taken before and during the renovation show a butterscotch-and-brown exterior with a missing portico column, a fireplace in need of repointing, and floors, doors, stairs, and trim unified by a depressing faux-mahogany stain.

The trick was to protect the intimacy of existing rooms while paying attention to the scale and style of new elements, like living room built-ins and kitchen cabinets. On top of staying true to the house, this approach took care of a problem the couple had had at their Brooklyn loft—a space so vast, open, and sound-conducting, Heide confesses, it left them cold.



ABOVE: Rafe Churchill and Heide Hendricks, with Rufus, 9, and Hollis, 12, gather in the sunroom addition. **TOP:** Easygoing furnishings in the adjacent dining room set the stage for family meals. **RIGHT:** Traffic circulates through to the center hall and stairs. *Paint: Farrow & Ball's Hay (sunroom walls and trim)*



RIGHT: The snug new mudroom has terrific views framed by blue-gray windows, edge-bead paneling, a sturdy brick floor, and a daybed nabbed at an antiques store in Millerton, New York.
Paint: Farrow & Ball's Down Pipe (windows)

SHOP THIS STYLE

To find furnishings similar to those used in this house, go to wayfair.com/thisoldhouse



Rather than bust open the first floor, they opted to simply widen the passageway between the kitchen and the dining room, keeping this little den (for Legos and TV) and that little living room–library (for reading and napping). And hands off the plaster, though it meant sacrificing central air on the second floor and blowing in cellulose behind walls to avoid having to open them up for spray foam.

Still, “you want to be able to see the kids in the TV room while you’re by the fire in the library,” says Heide, citing a vision of family harmony achieved by installing pocket doors with divided lights between the two rooms. “At first, we closed them so we wouldn’t have to hear *Shrek*,” says Rafe. “Now the kids close the doors because they don’t want to hear PBS.”

The hardest part to get just right was the kitchen, says Heide, who does much of the cooking. She wanted plenty of storage and pro-style appliances. Rafe wanted “to keep it simple,” as he puts it. They decided on base cabinets only and a pantry with open shelves. A humble wood table takes the place of the customary runway-size island–cum–breakfast bar.



LEFT: The master bath's painted pedestal tub is set off by deep-yellow walls.

RIGHT: Pale neutrals, rich jewel tones, and a mix of textures warm up the master bedroom.

BELOW: Lucky girl Hollis has an arched canopy bed complemented by a bold patterned accent wall.

Paint: Farrow & Ball's Gervase Yellow (master-bath walls) and Light Blue (master-bedroom walls).

Wallpaper: Marcel

Wanders (girl's bedroom). Throws:

Faribault Woolen Mill Co.



Shuffling the layout upstairs yielded separate bedrooms for Hollis, now 12, and Rufus, 9, a new hall bath, and a master suite fashioned from the remaining three rooms. Two attic bedrooms became a playroom and a guest room. Though it no longer has a dirt floor, the basement is still just a basement, while a wide porch added in back allows the family to drink in views of the protected land that extends beyond their two-acre parcel. Rafe designed a fence that corrals the family's wheaten terrier, Daisy, and built three "follies"—a studio for Heide, a coop for the chickens and firewood, and a garden shed—which joined an existing red-metal barn.

Inside, the feeling is sunny and open even if the plan is not, thanks partly to the center staircase that drew the couple to the house in the first place. Heide layered new and vintage finds—"I'm not interested in design that will be dated in 10 years," she says—and added to the coziness with comfortable seating, incandescent lighting, and heavy linen curtains. A sophisticated palette and the couple's signature high-contrast trim and window colors help keep the place from feeling quaint.

It has become a showroom of sorts, where potential clients can drop by to appreciate what Rafe calls "historically influenced" design. Some visitors have to guess which parts of the house date to 1929 and which to today—and that's just how the couple like it. "If you lightly touch an existing structure," Rafe likes to say, "it will last another 100 years." 🏡

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This Old House

TOP 100

BEST NEW HOME
PRODUCTS
2015

You want your home to be just right. But where to start when it comes to finding ways to feather the perfect nest? Here would be a good place. Whether you're plunging into a remodel (see Building Products, page 84) or working out the last of the decorative details (see Finishing Touches, page 86), we've done the legwork for you—vetting countless new offerings for every aspect of the house in seven categories. ***Turn the page*** to see the result, a list that should keep you happily occupied until at least this time next year. »

kitchen



The blade type is stamped on the butt of the kitchen knives.



01. 5-Minute Pizza Oven & Snack Maker

» **Black + Decker**

Mimicking pro-style pizza ovens, this hot little number rises to 625°F and encloses your dinner in a low-ceilinged chamber that radiates heat from above and below, to brown and blister in no time. Just don't try to make toast. **\$150; blackanddecker.com**

02. Ascenta Scoop Handle Dishwasher » **Bosch**

Strong, silent types are what we expect from this maker, but never before at such a price. This one purrs a touch more noticeably than its pricier siblings (46 decibels vs. 38), but it's still so stealthy that it features a small red light to indicate when it's on. **\$599; bosch-home.com**

03. Self-Sharpening Cutlery Set with SharplN Technology » **Calphalon**

Ceramic sharpeners built into the upper slots of this wood storage block automatically hone straight-edge knives at the correct angle each time they're put away. Sharp idea. **\$150 for the 12-piece set; calphalon.com**

04. Masterpiece Collection Blender » **Electrolux**

Here's a twist: a blender tilted off-axis. Why? So that its six titanium-coated blades churn through ingredients without creating a funnel, which forms a narrow pulverization zone while allowing larger bits to float at sea. Turns ice into slush in seconds. **\$349; electroluxappliances.com**

05. Mouse Trap Kit » **PIC**

Tucked inside this enticing lair is a lethal set of serrated jaws poised with a sensitive double spring to come down over a deep-seated "bait well" at the slightest furry-footed disturbance. A better mouse trap indeed. Reusable, if you'd like. **\$7.99; livingpestfree.com**

06. Steel Pull-Down Kitchen Faucet » **Franke**

A 360° swivel spout takes the dual-spray head, with full and needle patterns, into every corner you want to reach. Even better: It's solid stainless steel—no lead, no corrosion—at half the price of typical pro-style models. **\$545; franke.com**

07. ProHygienic 21 Sink Surface » **Schock**

The tight-knit molecular makeup of this harder-than-granite surface renders it scratchproof, heat-resistant, and closed off to stains. And the nonporous finish that prevents food from settling in also gives germs no place to grow, meaning it's antibacterial. **\$315 for a bar sink; schock.com**

08. Totem » **Joseph Joseph**

The ability to customize how you use the space in this extra-tall waste-separation unit is what caught our eye. A large top section plus a bottom drawer that can be divided in two make sorting recyclables a cinch. **\$249 for the 60-liter bin (shown); josephjoseph.com**

09. Aluminum Rolling Pin » **KMN**

Not only is the aluminum nonstick, but if you chill it in the freezer, it also keeps shortening from melting into the dough, which makes for a better crust. Laser-engraved graduated measurements help you get just the size crust you want. How cool is that? **\$40; kmnhome.com**

10. Toekick Drawer » **Diamond Cabinets**

Leave no cranny unused, we say. This concealed drawer utilizes undercabinet space—as in, under the base cabinet—to stash kitchenwares. Perfect for ungainly cookie sheets. Just nudge it with your toe to activate the push-to-open mechanism. **From \$515; diamondcabinets.com**

11. Cold Brew Coffee Maker » **OXO**

A batch of steeped coffee takes upwards of 12 hours to make, but one swig of sediment ruins it. Not here. Two filters catch grounds, ensuring smooth

sipping. The whole system nests neatly for easy storage. **\$50; oxo.com**

12. Professional Gas Front-Control Freestanding Range » **Frigidaire**

With an oval griddle-and-low-simmer fifth burner, a single 18,000-Btu superburner, and of course those meaty knobs that signify "serious chef," this 30-inch stainless-steel gas range delivers pro cred at a digestible price. Yet it also has pragmatic features like a smudge-proof coating and quick preheat. **\$2,699; frigidaire.com**

13. Ready to Wear Tile » **Crossville**

You'd almost be convinced that this tile is the softest linen, until you touch it and discover it's actually impervious porcelain with a fine raised pattern. And for a surface so haute, we love that the price is well within reach. **From \$3.82 per square foot; crossvilleinc.com**

14. Cyclonic Wave Microwave with Inverter Technology » **Panasonic**

Old-school microwave patterns go up and down, whereas this oven's run in circles, penetrating the food more evenly for quicker cooking times and fewer cold spots. At 2.2 cubic feet, this zapper can handle your biggest lasagna. **\$375; shop.panasonic.com**

12



13



Its clean lines make it a great candidate for a built-in location.

14



bath



A matte finish keeps concrete counters looking clean.



15. Magnetix Showerhead » Moen

Hold this sprayer up to its magnetic dock and marvel as it snaps right into place. Especially satisfying for someone with limited mobility, though anyone can appreciate not having to fumble for the cradle. **From \$61; moen.com**

16. Sensonic Speaker Fan » Broan

Wish we'd thought of this first: stashing Bluetooth speakers in the housing of the bath fan. Keeps the vanity counter clear of electronics and keeps you grooving—even when the whisper-quiet fan is running. Also sold as a retrofit kit. **\$383; broan.com**

17. Center Trench Shower Pan » Tile Redi

Meet the first one-piece shower pan with an integrated linear drain—a sleek alternative to the typical center-hole arrangement. Order it to align with your existing drain, drop it into a bed of thinset, and, once that dries, you can tile right over the pan, all with the satisfaction of knowing it'll never leak. **\$649 for a 34-by-48-inch pan; tileredi.com**

18. Chevron Marble Bath Collection » Crosscill

This classic pattern has never looked classier. Hewn from gray and white marble, the eight-piece collection runs the gamut from a toothbrush

holder to a wastebasket. **From \$15 apiece; crosscill.com**

19. Palomar Vanity Top with Integral Sink » Native Trails

Among the many reasons to love an integrated sink in the bath—seamless construction, easy installation, quick cleaning—we found one more in this version. Made from a blend of cement and jute fiber, it's 40 percent lighter than standard concrete and just as durable. Available in two finishes: Ash and Slate. **From \$945; nativetrails.net**

20. Alape Bucket Sink » Rejuvenation

At 13 inches deep, this tough

glazed-steel sink has a shallower profile, by about half, than most utility sinks, making it ideal for small baths and mudrooms where space might be on the tight side. We were also taken with its vintage looks. **\$249; rejuvenation.com**

21. Brevard Toilet with FlushIQ Technology » Delta

We're hip to touchless toilets, but this model leverages the technology even further: A sensor in the bowl detects when the water has risen to a critical level and blocks additional flushes, preventing overflows. It's downright merciful. **\$499; deltafaucet.com**

22



24



23



25



26



This curvaceous model has moves—it swivels!

27



28



22. Retro-Fit Shower System » Grohe

The slide bar for this handshower does double-duty as a plumbing pipe—fooled us!—that taps water directly from the old showerhead connection. That means you can pull off a stylish upgrade without opening up the tiled wall. Sounds like a perfect Saturday morning to us. **From \$599; grohe.com**

23. Blendart Tile » Walker Zanger

Weathered wood underfoot in the bath? Yes, and without the worry of damaging it. This porcelain tile looks just like rustic barnboard siding, but it's completely waterproof

and, of course, splinter-free. Choose from or mix five colors. **From \$9.25 per square foot; walkerzanger.com**

24. Activewash Top-Load Washer » Samsung

No more drippy clothes trailing water from sink to machine. Just scrub out stains in the innovative hinged basin that sits above the wash drum, then lift it up to drop clothes through a slot at the back—and into the machine for the regular cycle. **From \$899; samsung.com**

25. Michael Berman Graceline C-Spout Widespread Lavatory Faucet » Rohl

With its elegant arcing spout

and satin gold-colored finish, this lavatory set is so distinctive, we want to build a bathroom around it. Levers with thumb depressions evoke deck cleats, a shapely visual reference to the early-20th-century ocean liners that captured the imagination of the faucet's namesake designer. **\$1,599; rohlhome.com**

26. Kensington Storage Mirror » Pottery Barn

A revamp of the classic medicine cabinet moves the storage to the bottom, creating an easy-access shelf above for all your daily items. And its looks are definitely worthy of a daily double take. **\$399; potterybarn.com**

27. Serenity 55 Soaker » Aquatic

Here's the perfect tub for those of us who desire large-space amenities in our small-space reality. The 63-inch acrylic drop-in features a deep bathing well but still fits into standard 5½-foot alcoves. **\$1,805; aquaticbath.com**

28. EcoHybrid Heat Pump Dryer » LG

A heat pump similar to those found in air conditioners and dehumidifiers recycles heat, reducing energy use by as much as 53 percent in this electric dryer. What else do you need to know? **\$1,700; lg.com**

tools

29. 20-Volt Max 7¼-Inch Sliding Miter Saw

» DeWalt

You wouldn't frame a house using a 7¼-inch cordless sliding miter saw, but this one has the muscle to trim any of its rooms. The 20-volt battery powers 275 cuts through standard pine baseboard on one charge, and at 30 pounds, it's easy to carry around the house. **\$399; dewalt.com**

30. Hyperdrive 18-Gauge Brushless Brad Nailer

» Ridgid

Our condolences to compressors, gas-filled cartridges, and the notion that cordless nailers are weak and slow. The efficiency of the brushless motor allows this tool to sink 2,000 nails per battery charge, and the compression chamber fires fasteners as quickly as a traditional tool. **\$229; ridgid.com**

31. Liquid Plastic Welder Kit

» Bondic

This thing is awesome! Use the special resin in the pen to mend cracked tool housings, punctured boots, exposed charging cords, and so much more, then zap the goop with the UV light, hardening it in 4 seconds flat—even underwater. **\$22; notaglu.com**

32. Jobsite Gargantuan Giant Debris Collector

» Quickie

How long have we had the push broom? Well, now there's a

dustpan just as wide. It's about time. **\$17; quickie.com**

33. Smart Measure Pro

» Stanley

Piggyback this device on your smartphone and snap a photo of a floor to be refinished, a wall to be repainted, or an exterior to be re-sided. Then use your finger to outline the area and the app calculates how much material you'll need for the job. **\$150; stanleytools.com**

34. Flip and Grip Multi-Tool

» Crescent

Pliers? Pshaw. A ratcheting wrench turns 40 different fasteners between ⅜ and ⅝, including the arbor on your circular saw. **\$33; crescenttool.com**

35. 18-Volt ONE+ Drain Auger

» Ryobi

Pull the trigger and the drum on this cordless snake feeds up to 25 feet of stainless-steel cable down sink or shower drains. Pays for itself the first time you don't have to call a plumber. **\$170; ryobitools.com**



Handles on three sides make it easy to grab and go.

29



30



31



32



33



34

Laminated metal makes for a pleasingly hefty tool.



35





37

This little gripper is pictured actual size!



38



39



41



40



42

36. Apprentice 3-Foot Level

» **Mosely Infinity Level**

Still think a level is a level? Milled notches in the ends of this aluminum work of art accept other 12- or 24-inch sections to lengthen it or form a giant square, handy for getting doors level and plumb in one go. Screw through the orange knobs and dial in a ledger for tile or cabinets. **\$229; mosely.us**

37. 18-Volt LXT Lithium-Ion Brushless 6½-Inch Circular Saw

» **Makita U.S.A.**

We couldn't pass up a workhorse that cuts 432 feet of OSB or makes 274 slices through 2×4 on a single charge—it's the longest-lasting cordless circ saw we've seen. **\$389; makitatools.com**

38. WD-40 EZReach

» **WD-40**

This repackaging of a trusty lube solves that greatest of garage mysteries: Where do all the little red spray straws go? An attached flexible tube stays where you bend it for precision squirts and folds down out of the nozzle's way for a wider spray. **\$8; wd40.com**

39. CompactXR Thermal Imaging Camera

» **Seek Thermal**

Plug this thermal camera into your smartphone, open its app, and look through walls, floors, and ceilings for gaps in insulation, water leaks, or—show-off!—cool spots on the grill. **\$299; thermal.com**

40. 46-Inch Rolling Steel Storage Chest and Cabinet

» **Milwaukee**

We've searched and, for the money, no other tool chest

comes close: It's built to hold 1,800 pounds, and it has soft-close drawers with precut liners, plus smart features like built-in power strips to keep batteries juiced.

\$800; milwaukeetool.com

41. Mini Pliers Wrench

» **Knipex Tools**

So long, sloppy thumbscrew. This wrench's parallel jaws adjust at the push of a button and stay put with a squeeze of the handles.

\$65; knipextools.com

42. SandBlaster Ultra Flexible Sanding Sheets

» **3M**

The abrasive is adhered to a flexible plastic film that hugs profiles far better than traditional paper or a sanding sponge. The sheets also resist clogging and last up to 15 times longer than the paper stuff. **\$5 for four sheets; diy.3m.com**

43. Support XL Portable Work System

» **Centipede Tool**

Like a pop-up tent but way stronger, this work stand's truss legs accordion out to create a platform big enough to fit a 4-by-8-foot sheet of plywood and support 1½ tons—instant workbench. Then it folds up to the size of a portable playpen.

\$130; centipedetool.com



43

home tech



44



46



47



48



49



51



52



50



53

An LED bulb that boosts Wi-Fi range by 100 feet.



54

55

44. BCC 100 Construction Camera » Brinno

Keep tabs on the progress of the basement remodel or the biggest Lego tower ever with this ingenious camera. It combines JPEG photos taken at an interval you set into a time-lapse video and stores it on an SD card. Play it back at the speed you want. **\$264; brinno.com**

45. Air-Quality Monitor » Awair

Your nose can't tell the quality of the air you breathe, but the sensors in this walnut box can. It monitors VOCs, CO₂, dust, humidity, and temperature every 5 to 10 seconds. Check in remotely anytime from your smartphone. The app also tracks air-quality history and recommends corrective actions, such as adding houseplants when CO₂ levels become elevated. **\$199; getawair.com**

46. Roost Smart Battery » Roost

Now this is our kind of upgrade: a Wi-Fi replacement battery that turns any existing 9-volt smoke detector or CO alarm into a smart-home device. It'll ping your phone if it's running low or a detector is triggered. Smarter still: You can silence false alarms from your phone. **\$35; getroost.com**



56

47. USB Charger » SnapPower

Remove an outlet's cover plate, replace it with this one, and suddenly you have a USB port on the wall that lets you charge without a power block. Its contacts capture juice from the terminals, without getting in the way of the receptacles. **\$20; snappower.com**

48. Smart Registers » Ecovent

By opening and closing automatically, these retrofit registers achieve the Holy Grail of forced-air comfort: room-by-room zoning without unbalancing the system. A wireless sensor for each zone monitors temperature, humidity, and occupancy and can be controlled remotely with a smartphone. **From \$1,000 for a two-bedroom home; ecoventsystems.com**

49. Doorbell Cam » August

Meet the smart-home product we've been waiting for: a video doorbell that lets you talk to visitors from your smartphone and then—if you have the company's companion smart door lock—let them in. You'll wonder how you ever lived without it. **\$199; august.com**

50. Bolt 2-in-1 Stick Vacuum » Bissell

The nightmare of corner grime is over. This combo stick vac and handheld diverts some of the suction to side ports that draw up dirt from the baseboards as well as the floorboards. **\$90; bissell.com**

A crisp profile fits perfectly in an open, airy plan.

51. Intense Pure Air » Rowenta

Here's the first air purifier to go after formaldehyde, with a filter that converts the carcinogenic molecules into larger, harmless ones that get stuck in its pores. That's on top of a HEPA filter for fine dust, bacteria, and pollen and a carbon filter that takes care of smoke, odors, and VOCs. Air-quality sensors automatically adjust the flow. **From \$299; rowenta.com**

52. Almond+ Wi-Fi Router » Securifi

Every electronic device should be so easy to set up: Unbox it, connect it, tap a few screen prompts, and you're surfing like Gidget. To justify the price, it doubles as a smart-home hub. **\$250; securifi.com**

53. Boost LED Bulb » Sengled

Eliminate dark spaces and Wi-Fi dead zones in one fell swoop with the only dimmable LED equipped with a wireless repeater. **\$50; sengled.com**

54. Model I Water Heater » Heatworks

This compact unit warms water by passing current between a submerged array of graphite plates that precisely modulate water temperature to meet demand—an energy-saving first. Stash the rustproof tank under a bath sink for nearly

instantaneous hot showers. **\$469; myheatworks.com**

55. Ozone Ceiling Fan » Lamps Plus

A true eureka moment: This brushed-nickel breeze-maker hides its compact DC motor in the ceiling (between joists) so you don't have to look at it. Call a pro to install it. **\$500; lampsplus.com**

56. Serenity Series Air Conditioner » Haier

Cooling comfort isn't much good if it introduces another discomfort—namely, the racket made by most window ACs. Not this one, which claims to be the quietest on the market: 43 decibels for the 6,050-Btu unit, which covers 250 square feet. And you won't break a sweat on the install. **\$300; haieramerica.com**

57. Chimney Plug » Flueblocker

Keep the heat in and the sooty smells out by plugging your chimney with a stopper made of dense, durable wool felt. Order it to size, round or rectangular. **From \$35; flueblocker.com**

57

A handy handle makes this draft dodger easy to remove.



outdoor

58. Shag Dot » Chilewich

All-weather polypropylene is hooked into plush tufts and bonded to a tough vinyl backing, making for a rug that's both comfy and durable. The 24-inch rounds are a perfect doormat size—and they come in five colors, so patio-size games of Twister are an option, too. **\$50 each; chilewich.com**

59. Deluxe Digital Electric Smoker » Char-Broil

Not a pit master? This uses a timer and an electronically controlled heating element to make barbecue good enough to stand in line for, with just the right amount of smoky flavor. Set it and forget it. **\$300; charbroil.com**

60. 56-Volt Max Lithium-Ion 19-Inch Lawn Mower » Worx

It's impressive that a battery-powered mower can cut nearly a quarter acre per charge, but it's the design details here that really won us over. Caster wheels out front turn on a dime, the one-touch folding handle frees up floor space, and the garden-hose port makes post-mow cleaning sessions a snap. **\$500; worx.com**

61. 16-Inch, 58-Volt Lithium-Ion Brushless Cordless Chain Saw » Echo

If you think this is merely a fancy pruner, think again. Thanks to a brushless motor and a 58-volt lithium-ion battery, this cutter can fell a 2-foot-diameter tree without flinching. **\$300; echocordless.com**

62. Outdoor Storage » Trex

We're thrilled to see custom-look built-ins for the deck. Made from weatherproof PVC in five tropical-hardwood-inspired colors, they can be outfitted for storage or with a cooler insert. **\$1,498 for 18-inch base cabinet with slide-out waste bin (shown); trex.com**

63. Terminix AllClear Mosquito Bait & Kill » Universal Pest Solutions

Spray this sugary bait laced with encapsulated garlic oil on plants in your yard and it lures mosquitoes, which ingest it and die. Local populations virtually disappear in 21 days. Safe for use around people, pets, and food. And it won't harm bees or butterflies. **\$13; baitandkill.com**

64. 2.2-Gallon Gas Can » Surecan

First of all, the nozzle is at the bottom, so you don't have to tip



59



58

A boost mode spins the blade faster for tall grass.



60

63



62



64



61



65



66



67



68



69



71



70

the can (it swivels). Second, fuel doesn't flow until you press the trigger. Third, you can now refill the lawn mower without spilling gas. **\$37; surecanusa.com**

65. Self-Watering Planter

» **WaterEase**

Pots that water your plants have been around, but this one has an adjustable reservoir that holds up to 2½ quarts with a port that lets you control how much water plants can absorb. Close it for plants that like moist soil or open it for desert varieties. **\$27 each; gardeners.com**

66. Smart Irrigation Controller

» **Spruce**

Unlike other smart controllers that stop at smartphone integration and weather predictions, this lawn butler pairs with ZigBee-enabled moisture sensors. Sink the wireless spikes into your lawn and they'll signal the sprinklers to irrigate when your Kentucky bluegrass is feeling a bit parched. **From \$260; spruceirrigation.com**

67. Tamiami Vinyl Lace Patio Chairs

» **Brown Jordan**

A classic mid-century look goes bold thanks to a 12-color mix-and-match system for both the powder-coated aluminum frame and the vinyl straps. You get a custom look at an off-the-shelf price. **\$255 per armchair; brownjordan.com**

68. Hori Hori Knife

» **Barebones**

The bamboo-handle Japanese gardening staple is the definition of a multiuse tool, and this version's tempered steel blade keeps its edge longer than stainless-steel blades. Use it to dig, cut twine, prune, weed, or hammer in stakes. Then sit back and enjoy the fruits of your labor by popping the top off a bottle of suds—the hook doubles as a bottle opener. **\$30; barebonesliving.com**

69. Dual-Stage Snowblower with Quiet Engine

» **Craftsman**

How useful is a snow thrower if it's too noisy to fire up at 7 A.M. on a winter weekday, which, of course, is exactly when you need to clear the driveway? Not very. This 208cc dual-stage machine heaves the powder, but its modified exhaust reduces noise by about 45 percent so you can blast a path without raising the dead. **\$880; craftsman.com**

70. Dual-Tine Poly Leaf Rake with Hand Rake

» **Ames**

Two rows of tines make gathering leaves and debris faster and easier. We love the onboard mini-rake for reaching into tight spots between shrubs. **\$25; ames.com**

71. Garage Doors

» **Pella**

A combination of three polyester-based paints that mimic the tone of oak, walnut, or mahogany makes these new faux-wood embossed-steel garage doors seem anything but fake. Finally, the look of a real wood door without the maintenance or budget-busting cost. **From \$1,400; pella.com**

A 26-inch-wide head clears lawns fast but won't strain your back.

building products



73



74

72. Oil Bond » Latex Agent
Eliminate the tedious prep step of sanding and priming with this miracle additive: Wipe it on to clean and degloss, mix it into your latex paint, and it bonds to itself to form a no-peel finish. **\$15 per quart; latexagent.com**



72

73. Red Diamond Wallaba Hardwood Shingles » FLW International
What's wallaba? A dense, oily wood so rot-resistant that it's used for telephone poles in its native Guyana. There, a new state-of-the-art mill takes logs from strictly managed forests and turns them into roofing and siding shingles with a Class A fire rating and an astounding 50-year warranty. **\$400 per square; reddiamondshingles.com**



75



76



77

Push a button to tilt sash for easy cleaning.



78



80



79

74. Zip System Stretch Tape » Huber Engineered Woods
Finally, a sticky flashing membrane that can be repositioned if it adheres to itself. Oh, and it stretches—nice for bending around circular exhaust vents and the like. **\$115 for a 75-foot roll; zipsystemstretchtape.com**



81



Works in temperatures down to 0°F, even on wet surfaces.



82



83

75. Flexible Italian Porcelain Tile » Torino

Planks of plasticized porcelain cast as 67-inch lengths of realistic wood-grain tile conform to the floor, so in dry areas you can lay them without thinset or grout for a lickety-split install. The tight spacing just reinforces the wood look. **\$7.25 per square foot; builddirect.com**

76. Q-Max Pro Concrete Mix » Quikrete

For those times when you'd rather not order a truckload of cement, now you can get high-performance concrete in a bag. Reinforcing fibers limit cracking, corrosion inhibitors protect rebar and mesh from rust, and additives resist freeze-thaw damage. **\$10; quikrete.com**

77. Next Generation Ultimate Double-Hung Window » Marvin

Here's how to reinvent a classic: Equip it with multipoint locking hardware that's concealed in the sashes and jambs, and use a cam that looks like a traditional sash lock to control it. You can leave the window vented and locked at the same time. **From \$369; marvin.com**

78. Gorilla Construction Adhesive » Gorilla Glue

Paintable, waterproof, and UV-resistant adhesives exist, but this muscular new hybrid polymer also grabs within 30 seconds, sets within a day, and bonds to wood, metal, foam, concrete, and so on. Moisture-cured, it doesn't shrink or stink. **\$8; gorillatough.com**

79. Sketch Pad Dry-Erase Coating » Sherwin-Williams

Go ahead, write on the wall—as long as it bears this unique two-

part epoxy coating. Its clear, high-gloss surface wipes free of scribbles left by dry-erase markers and lets the underlying color show through. **\$50 for a kit covering 50 square feet; sherwin-williams.com**

80. Hardwoof Flooring » Nydree Flooring

Ever wonder why the hardwood floors in hotel lobbies always look fresh? Because much of it is flooring that features a natural wood veneer impregnated with acrylic, making it 300 percent harder than standard wood flooring and extremely abrasion-resistant to boot. Now homeowners can buy it, too. **\$8.50 per square foot; hardwoof.com**

81. ShapeCrete » Sakrete and Cheng Design

Forget the kiln: Here's a concrete that behaves like clay. For about 45 minutes after you add water, you can sculpt, carve, or cast this amazing stuff into pots, planters, whatever you can imagine. One day later, it turns rock-hard. **\$25 for 20 pounds; shapecrete.com**

82. Quad Max Sealant » OSI

Siding joints require a flexible caulk, and we've never seen one more flexible than this paintable sealant, which stretches up to five times its original length, 50 percent in width. **\$8; ositough.com**

83. House Hydrant » Aquor Water Systems

In place of an obtrusive spigot, this sleek freezeproof fitting sits flat against the siding. To get water, just insert the

blue connector and give it a quarter turn clockwise; remove it to shut off the flow. **\$50; aquorwatersystems.com**

84. Exotic Wood Decking » Green World Lumber

Genuine mahogany decking? We couldn't believe it either. Someone in Fiji had the forethought in the 1950s to plant *Swietenia macrophylla*, trees that today are mostly gone from natural forests. Lumber from the sustainably managed plantation is now making its way here in the form of deck boards—prized for their durability and rich hue. **\$4.49 per lineal foot; greenworldlumber.com**

85. FoldUp Window » HeartWood Fine Windows and Doors

Ahhh, a window that doesn't block breeze or view when it's open. When shut, it looks like a double-hung, but the hinged mahogany sashes fold toward each other as you lift. **From \$3,000; heartwoodwindowsanddoors.com**

85



84

finishing touches

86. Paint-a-Pillow

» Cutting Edge Stencils

Playing designer has never been so easy. This DIY kit lets you customize the perfect accent pillow from a whopping selection of 160 stencil designs. You receive a canvas cover, a stencil, paint, brushes and a roller—even the pillow!—all in one box, delivered to your door.

\$45; paintapillow.com

87. Vigneto Shelving

» Ballard Designs

No room for a bar cart? Thanks to this fresh take on the open-shelving trend, all you need is a slice of wall space to create an elevated drink station with rustic appeal. Stemware slides into undermount slats, a real space-saver. That's something worth raising a glass to.

\$99; ballarddesigns.com

88. Splash Hardware

» Amerock

Calling all color enthusiasts: These eye-catching knobs and pulls—a cheery antidote to all-white cabinetry—come in 20 designs and 20 vibrant hues. Oh, the possibilities! (Four hundred, to be exact.)

From \$7 apiece; amerock.com



86



87



88



89

90

91



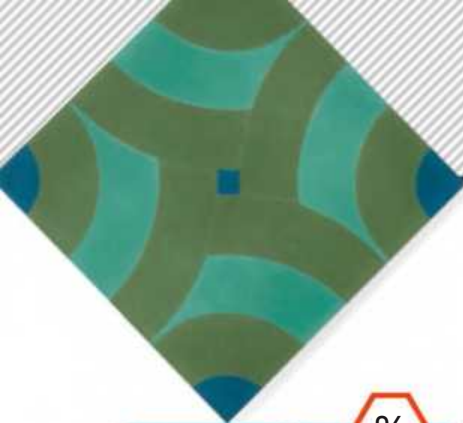
92



93



Mix and match shade shapes and colors to complement the base.



89. Grafik T Dimmer and Switch » Lutron

From the inventor of the dimmer, a striking reinvention. A touch-sensitive LED bar lets you turn on the lights at a certain level of brightness according to the spot you select along its height—no toggling or sliding or turning. **From \$67; lutron.com**

90. Nova Duvet Cover » Crane & Canopy

If making your bed up with a flat sheet every morning just isn't in the stars, let this clever comforter help. A wide hem at the top gives the illusion that you've done the complete job, but really all you had to do was smooth out one layer of bedding. **From \$129 (twin); craneandcanopy.com**

91. Color Plus Wexler Lamp » Lamps Plus

With its wood accent and customizable shade, this handmade lamp is a little bit modern, a little bit not, meaning it looks good no matter where you plug it in. It comes in 150 colors, so go crazy—match it to the new wallpaper, or use it to punch up an otherwise neutral scheme. **From \$130; lampsplus.com**

92. V6 Mattress Vac » Dyson

Hyper-powerful suction helps this handheld capture 99.7 percent of particles from mattress fibers—including allergy-inducing dust mites and even some bacteria. We tested it on a year-old

mattress and the results were... disturbing. Next up: the couch. **\$249; dyson.com**

93. Timberchic » Timberchic

At only 1/8 inch thick, this ultra-thin wood wall covering, reclaimed from a river in northern Maine, gives any room a rustic vibe without bulking up the walls. Did we mention these veneers are peel-and-stick? DIY doesn't get any easier, folks. **From \$10 per square foot; timberchic.com**

94. Cement Tile » Clé

At a mere half inch, these handmade 8-by-8-inch beauties are thinner than typical cement tiles. The result? A cleaner edge for installations, better alignment with adjacent surfaces, and less overall weight. **From \$13.50 per square foot; cletile.com**

95. Surestrip Wallpaper » York

In the past, strippable paper had to be soaked in a water tray to activate the glue. With this new version, a spritz will do, making the whole affair less intimidating. Plus, it comes down as easily as it goes up—wall intact. **\$44–\$60 per single roll; yorkwall.com**

96. Timeline Skinnies » Timeline

Prefinished to look aged in a variety of colors, these lightweight planks tack right up to give you the look of salvaged wood without the

hassle or heft. **\$45 for a six-pack; homedepot.com**

97. Filament LED » AXP Technology

These bulbs mimic the look of old-timey incandescents by embedding dozens of tiny LEDs into filament-like rods. Yet they'll last for decades. **\$10; axptechnology.com**

98. Chalked Paint » Rust-Oleum

Finally, an authentic chalky paint from the home center. Like boutique specialty versions, this formulation is made with limestone, the key to producing that just-so matte finish. Available in more than two dozen colors. **\$15; rustoleum.com**

99. Muratto 3D Cork Bricks » Sustainable Materials

Cork is cool—it's reclaimed, renewable, natural. And now it comes in this brick shape. Three-dimensional wall tiles make for a noise-absorbing finish with a slightly contemporary feel. **\$14 per square foot; sustainablematerials.com**

100. 2-Piece Rug System » Ruggable

Carpet mess? Don't stress: Just peel back the lightweight, decorative upper layer of this rug and toss it in the washing machine. The Velcro-like bottom pad holds the rug in place while protecting your floors from spills. **From \$79; ruggable.com**



reader remodel

“We spent two years on an air mattress”



Husband-and-wife remodeling newbies learn to tackle everything from roofing to foundation walls while **renovating their first home**, a forgotten Italianate

By **Karl Gelles**, homeowner | Photographs by **Helen Norman** | Styling by **Susan Victoria**





< Livingroom

Scraping layers of paint off one of the home's five existing fireplaces revealed a detailed wood mantel and overmantel. No original moldings remained elsewhere in the room, so Amy and Karl Gelles (opposite) installed intricate crown and tall baseboard pieces. To get the look of elaborate, layered Victorian-style wallpapers, they added panel-style paper to the base of the wall and a matching border at the top before hand-stenciling stars on the wall and ceiling. (That how-to appeared in the July 2012 reader-created issue; see the full project at thisoldhouse.com/novdec2015.)

One spring day, soon

after we'd moved in, I was standing on a ladder on the front porch, struggling to pry off an old piece of molding. Finally, it broke in my hand, totally disintegrating. Undeterred, I continued scraping, and suddenly a stream of dirt, dust, and rotting wood began to pour out of the ceiling. I looked over and saw my visiting mother-in-law, eyes wide, with a look on her face like, *What have they just bought?*

Her concern was understandable. My wife, Amy, and I hadn't planned to do any of the work ourselves. When we found the house, an 1879 Italianate in Bedford, Virginia, we were still living about 3½ hours away, in Washington, D.C., and although we loved the place for its size and character, it just seemed like too big a project for us to do ourselves. You could hardly make it to the front door through the overgrowth of foliage, which reached all the way to the second story. Inside, the foundation was sinking in places, some of the floors were gone, and everything was covered in brown paint. But each time we scheduled someone to work, we'd sit there waiting and they'd never show. After a while, we figured we'd just do it on our own.

Of course, we were total newbies. Both of our dads work in construction, but neither of us really got to learn anything from them. At my dad's work sites, I spent most of the time swinging a broom, not a hammer. Amy had never even painted a room! And before this



Foyer >

Karl and Amy were able to preserve the stairs and the original Italianate newel post, as well as the plaster. They covered the walls with paneling and wallpaper scored on the cheap from the home center and added stenciling throughout. Even the fifth wall got special treatment, with delicate gold stars on the tray ceiling.



BEFORE



< Facade

The original sidelights and transom remain, but the old front door was too far gone to save. A door found at a salvage shop fit the wider-than-average opening and suits the style.



^ Parlor

Karl installed all the trim and panel molding on the walls to echo details on the original fireplace, closing up an old closet for a more finished, uniform look. The fireplace itself remained intact, but the insert was purchased new. The couple bought all the furniture secondhand, on Craigslist and eBay, and reupholstered much of it themselves.



BEFORE

house, we were renters. We were young, and maybe a little stupid, but excited to have a home of our own.

After we closed on the house, that June, we started on basic outdoor stuff, like replacing the gutters, installing new shingles, and pruning all that foliage. We did the master bathroom, too, because Amy said we couldn't live there unless there was a finished bathroom. In January, we finally moved in—and that's when we found out there was no insulation. So we slept on an air mattress and huddled by a woodstove to stay warm. It was like camping—but for two years.

For the most part, we tackled the house project by project—insulation, drywall, lighting—all done after watching videos online or asking our dads for tips. We shopped as we went, too, so that we could take advantage of sales and coupons, keeping anything we found in empty rooms until it was needed. It was slow, tiresome work, but in the end, after those six long years, we were glad to have put all the extra time and effort into the vintage-style details.

Even though we weren't sure, once we finished, that we would want to put this much work into a house ever again, we've since followed our dream of seaside living and moved to another older house, in coastal North Carolina. It's no longer just the two of us under the new roof—we now have a 2-year-old daughter and will be welcoming twins this December. So, while more DIY renovating is certainly in our future, one thing's for sure: There'll be no more sleeping on air mattresses. ■

“We were young, and maybe a little stupid, but excited to have a home of our own.”



< Dining room

An original plate rail rings the walls, which are painted a contrasting slate blue. The tall fireplace, painted the same white as the plate rail, door surround, and baseboards, becomes a simple, serene focal point for the space.



BEFORE



▲ Master bedroom

To get the original fireplace working again, Karl and Amy removed the cinder blocks from the opening, then tiled the brick surround and hearth. A garland appliqué added to the frieze visually balances the trim under the mantel shelf. Crown molding, lost over the years, was replaced, and new baseboards were added throughout. A delicate, vintage-inspired chandelier supplants the stodgy ceiling fan to complete the lighter overall mood of the room.

◀ Kitchen

The kitchen got a complete reno, but the couple managed to stick to their tight \$3,000 budget by buying floor models and using low-priced basics, such as white ceramic subway tile and home-center and flea-market cabinets. They personalized the look with leaded-glass inserts, aged-bronze bin pulls, and scrolled corbels. Another money-saving trick: As an alternative to a single piece of stone for the countertops, they opted for 12-by-12-inch granite tiles that they installed with dark grout. The effect is the same, at a fraction of the cost.



BEFORE

▼ Master bath

The master bathroom was the first room to be finished, before the couple moved in. Among the highlights: crown molding with corner blocks, to set off the tiled ceiling, and beadboard wainscoting that encircles the room. The slipper-style claw-foot tub is new, though the refinished bathroom floor is original.



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Ask

THIS OLD HOUSE

INSIDE

PLUGGED TUB / BROKEN FLOOR HEAT
/ COLD BRICK / TREE-TRUNK HOLES / MORE

Q What's the best saw for cutting down a Christmas tree?

—KRISTIN HAAG, ROCKY POINT, N.Y.

A We like metal bow saws. They're lightweight and make fast cuts through wet, sappy wood. Be sure to make long, smooth strokes, using as many of the blade's teeth as you can. And don't press too hard. The more pressure you apply, the likelier it is that the kerf will curve and the harder you'll have to push and pull. Let the blade do the work and you'll be through that trunk in no time.

—THE EDITORS

23

tips, tricks, and
answers to
your home-
improvement
questions

*Our cast
of veteran
experts*



TOM SILVA
General Contractor



NORM ABRAM
Master Carpenter



RICHARD TRETHEWEY
Plumbing and Heating
Expert



ROGER COOK
Landscape Contractor



KEVIN O'CONNOR
Host

Q My bathtub is draining slowly, and I'm pretty sure the cause is a hair clog. How should I take care of this problem?

—KATRINA NAMAD, EAGAN, MINN.



To clean a clogged bathtub drain, Richard Trethewey feeds a plumbing snake through the tub's overflow.

RICHARD TRETHEWEY REPLIES: Most likely, your clog is in the p-trap, a curved section of the tub's drainpipe just below the floor. The tool of choice to unclog it is a plumbing snake, a flexible length of tightly coiled wire with a wire auger, known as a boring gimlet, on the business end. You insert the snake through the tub overflow, giving you a straight shot to the trap.

First unscrew the overflow cover and remove it along with the stopper assembly. Feed the snake down the overflow until you feel some resistance—you've reached the trap. Turn the handle clockwise as you push the snake 6 to 8 inches farther, through the clog. Now, without spinning it, slowly pull the snake back up. With any luck, you'll retrieve a wad of wet gunk, and that will be the end of your slow drain. Even if you get nothing, there's a good chance that you've pushed the clog through and cleared the trap.

Run some water to see if it drains. Just to be sure, reinsert the snake into the trap and jam it up and down as you flush water through the drain. Remove the snake, replace the stopper assembly, and reattach the overflow cover. Then consider placing a strainer over the drain to catch hair before it reaches the trap. To see a video of the

PHOTOS: ANTHONY TIEULI; (OPPOSITE PAGE) ANDREW MCCAUL

**What
is it?**



A
Drainpipe
reamer

B
Paint
mixer

C
Compost
churner

D
Bucket
scrubber

FOR THE ANSWER, SEE PAGE 98

steps I go through to snake a tub, go to thisoldhouse.com/novdec2015.

Q Radiant-floor fix

The heated electric floor in our tiled kitchen no longer works. Is there a way to locate a break in this kind of wiring so it can be repaired?

—RUSS BLINCO, VIA E-MAIL

KEVIN O'CONNOR REPLIES: Have you asked an electrician to make sure there's no other problem with your floor-heating system? If so, master electrician Scott Caron, owner of Caron Electric and a regular guest on *Ask This Old House* TV, says it is possible—but not easy—to find a break in hidden wires and repair it.

The trick is to use a device called a tone generator and probe. The generator clips to the wire you want to trace. The probe emits a ringing tone when it's directly over a buried but unbroken wire, then goes quiet where there's a break. "You can buy one at a home center for about \$40," Caron says. You'll also need to get a wire-splicing kit from the company that made your system. "Look for the manufacturer's name on the thermostat," Caron says.

Clip the generator to one of the floor-heating wires in the junction box, where

the heating system connects to the house wiring. Then use the probe to trace that wire as it zigzags back and forth under the tile. Focus on places where the wire would likely have been cut and, Caron says, "with a little luck and a lot of patience, you should be able to find the break."

Now carefully chip out the tile, without damaging any more wires. (Find the how-to for removing a tile at thisoldhouse.com/novdec2015.) After you splice the faulty wire, but before you lay a new tile, turn on the floor heat. If it works, congratulations! If not, you'll need to hunt down another break.

Q Leave lath or lose it?

After gutting the horsehair plaster, our contractor removed the wood lath on the exterior walls in order to insulate them. Should the lath also be removed from the ceiling before installing drywall?

—TIM BRUCE, RIVERSIDE, R.I.

TOM SILVA REPLIES: Just leave it. Lath actually stiffens the joists a bit, and there's no reason to add more debris to the landfill. As long as the drywall is fastened to the joists—not the lath—using screws that are ¼ inch longer than the ones for the walls, your new ceiling will be fine.

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GETTY IMAGES

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You'll find all the tools and supplies necessary for this—and any—home project at The Home Depot nearest you.

For step-by-step instructions, go to thisoldhouse.com/project

Ask THIS OLD HOUSE

Q Insulation for a brick house

The plaster walls of my 1930s Tudor-style brick house get really cold in the winter, but I've been warned against insulating them because we have some old knob-and-tube wiring. Any suggestions on how to make my home warmer this winter?

—EVELYN BOSTIC, CINCINNATI

TOM SILVA REPLIES: If that old wiring is still in use, then you're correct: Adding insulation would be a fire hazard. Knob-and-tube wiring has no jacket over the wires like modern cables do, so the bare wires were installed about 6 inches apart to prevent arcing and dissipate heat. If you packed insulation around those wires, they would get too hot.

Replacing the old wiring with new cables would not be difficult, but insulating the walls would be. And that insulation could actually make the brick more vulnerable to freeze-thaw cycles by reducing heat flow through the walls.

The best way to stay warmer in the winter—and cooler in the summer—is to upgrade the insulation in your attic. A house loses most of its heat through that space, and increasing its R-value will be easier and more

cost-effective than insulating the walls.

In your climate, the code calls for attics to be insulated to a minimum R-value of 38. (For a list of insulation requirements by state, go to energycodes.gov.) A contractor who specializes in energy retrofits can determine whether your attic meets that standard and, if not, how much extra insulation it should have. He or she can also see if the attic has any old wiring that needs to be replaced. If more insulation is called for, make sure the contractor seals any air leaks into the attic at the same time.

After the attic is taken care of, focus next on the basement, on the sill where the house sits on the foundation. Hiring a contractor to seal that perimeter with a closed-cell spray foam will go a long way toward keeping cold air out.

Once those two critical areas are insulated properly, you'll probably find that your home is comfortable enough—and your heating and cooling bills low enough—to make wall insulation unnecessary.

Q What to do with tree-trunk holes

I have a maple tree with a hole in the trunk where a limb was removed.

What is it?

D Bucket scrubber

When spun by a ½-inch drill in a little water, the Bucket Brush quickly cleans hardened mortar and grout from the inside of used 5-gallon buckets. \$21; contractorsdirect.com





There is some decay in the hole. Is there anything I can do to stop the rot?

—WILLIAM ELLINGTON, WAKE FOREST, N.C.

ROGER COOK REPLIES: The only way to stop rot is to prevent water from getting into the hole, either by

Holes often occur in tree trunks because branches were pruned improperly. To see the correct way to trim a limb, go to thisoldhouse.com/novdec2015.

capping it with metal or plugging it with spray foam. If the rot isn't too advanced, the tree may have a chance of recovering.

Before you do anything, call an arborist to make an assessment. He or she can evaluate the tree's overall health, see how much damage has occurred, and determine whether cables are needed to stabilize limbs.

If you decide to cap the hole, start by scraping out as much of the soft, rotted wood as you can. Then cover the hole with a piece of aluminum sheet metal, which won't rust. Cut it so that it overlaps the edges of the hole by a half inch or so, then bed the metal in a fat bead of silicone sealant and tack it in place with a few 1¼-inch stainless-steel siding nails. You can paint the patch to blend

in with the rest of the trunk.

If you seal the hole with foam, remove the rotted wood first, then use a canned spray that's formulated to fill big gaps. Once it hardens, trim the excess so that it will shed water. And be sure to paint the plug; sunlight breaks down unprotected foam. ■

Ask THIS OLD HOUSE

Go to: thisoldhouse.com/asktoH

Or write to: Ask This Old House
This Old House magazine
135 West 50th Street
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Include a complete address and daytime phone number. Published questions will be edited for clarity and length and may be used in other media. We regret that, because of the volume of mail received, we're unable to reply to unpublished questions.

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Directory

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COVER: See the listing for "True to Form."

HOME SOLUTIONS (pp. 17–24) Budget redo: Homeowner's blog: petitemodernlife.com.

BEFORE + AFTER KITCHEN: One big, happy cook space (pp. 27–29) **Architect:** Rosamund Young, AIA; rosamundyoung.com. **Builder/general contractor:** Tobia Construction; tobiaconstruction.com. **Gray cabinets:** Millcraft; 201-264-6596. **Black cabinets:** bertch.com. **Refrigerator:** geappliances.com. **Main sink faucet:** waterworks.com. **Stools:** crateandbarrel.com. **Floor runner:** dashandalbert.com. **Cabinet hardware:** restorationhardware.com.

BEFORE + AFTER BATH: Vintage revival (pp. 33–35) **Shower-enclosure installation:** mrshowerdoor.com. **Paint:** 1608 Ashland Slate (walls) and 1467 Baltic Gray (trim); benjaminmoore.com. N510-5 Liquid Mercury (tub, dresser, and radiator); behr.com. **Showerhead and fittings, sink faucet, and robe hook:** Cassidy Collection; deltafaucet.com. **Toilet:** americanstandard.com. **Roman shades:** Denise Enright Interior Design; 203-249-7201. **Fabric:** kravet.com. **Dresser paint kit:** Rust-Oleum Transformations in Linen; rustoleum.com. **Dresser stencil:** cuttingedgestencils.com.

BEFORE + AFTER OFFICE: Smartened up (pp. 36–37) **Designer:** Rachel Bauer; rachelbauerdesign.com. **Paint:** 2123-20 Caribbean Teal (cabinetry and woodwork); benjaminmoore.com.

GET THIS LOOK: Warm winter entry (pp. 38–39) **Wreath on door:** Magnolia-leaf wreath; etsy.com/shop/twoinspireyou. Gold ribbon on wreath; mjtrim.com.

DESIGN INSIDER: The case for moody neutrals (pp. 42–43) **Designer:** Barbara Westbrook; westbrookinteriors.com.

PHOTOSHOP REDO: Updating a bland ranch (p. 44) *Thanks to* Matthew Evans; arcanumarchitects.com.

WEEKEND REMODEL: How to build a kids' bookcase (pp. 46–49) **All materials and finishes:** homedepot.com.

CRAFTSMAN-STYLE CHARMER (pp. 51–62) **Cabinetry and countertops:** harriscabinetry.com. **Family room:** Loveseat; Bernhardt; noahj.co. **Chairs and ottoman:** Charles Stewart; noahj.co. **Antique coffee table:** hollandandcompany.com.

Puzzle drinks table: noahj.co. **Rug:** moattar.com. **Pillow fabric:** fshumacher.com. **Chandelier:** greymfurniture.com. **Dining area:** **Custom table:** Sonny Whitt; 423-488-5762. **Slipcovered chairs:** southofmarket.biz. **Windsor chairs:** craigslis.com. **Custom pendant light:** ymcfaddenllc.com. **Kitchen:** **Pendant light:** ymcfaddenllc.com. **Sconce:** wisteria.com. **Barstools:** St. Philip's Cathedral Antiques Show; ajc.com. **Accessories:** fiestafactorydirect.com and thecompanystore.com. **First-floor bedroom:** **Nightstands:** (left) hollandandcompany.com; (right) scottantiquemarket.com. **Lamps:** fshumacher.com. **Chair:** noahj.co. **Master bedroom:** **Chest and lamps:** noahj.co. **Custom chandelier:** lampshadesandfinials.com. **Pillow fabric:** fshumacher.com. **Master bath:** **Sconces:** masterpiecelighting.com. **Vintage stool and vanity mirrors:** ymcfaddenllc.com. **Sink mirror:** brooksandblack.com. **Bunk bedroom:** **Roman-shade fabric:** fshumacher.com. **Hall:** **Metal bins and boxes:** scottantiquemarket.com. **Hall bath:** **Paint:** B56-5 Adventure (cabinet); olympic.com. **Sink:** kohler.com. **Sconces:** restorationhardware.com. **Mirror:** brooksandblack.com. **Loft area:** **Star pendant:** serenaandlily.com. **Paper balls:** landofnod.com. **Roman-shade fabric:** fshumacher.com. **Barn-style sconce:** restorationhardware.com. **Outdoor rooms:** **Sofas:** potterybarn.com. **Ceramic side tables and pillow fabric:** fshumacher.com. **Wire side tables:** thecompanystore.com.

TRUE TO FORM (pp. 64–71) **General contractor and architectural designer:** Rafe Churchill; rafechurchill.com. **Interior designer:** Heide Hendricks; heidehendricks.com. **Floor refinishing:** franklinwood.com. **Light fixtures:** pwvintage.com. **Upholstery:** lesliefloodinteriors.com. **Wreaths:** etsy.com/shop/wholesalemagnolia. **Refrigerator:** liebherr-appliances.com. **Range:** subzero-wolf.com. **Wool throws:** faribaultmill.com. **Art (bathroom):** doodletownfarm.com.

ASK THIS OLD HOUSE (pp. 95–99) Q+A: **Radiant-floor fix:** *Thanks to* Scott Caron; caronelectric.com. ■

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5 American Cities Veterans Custom-Built Homes Changed Lives



U.S. Army Sergeant First Class (E-7) Joseph James, wife Jarin, and daughters (from left: Melanie, Sadie, and Rachel) at their new home dedication in Hendersonville, Tennessee on Friday, September 18, 2015.



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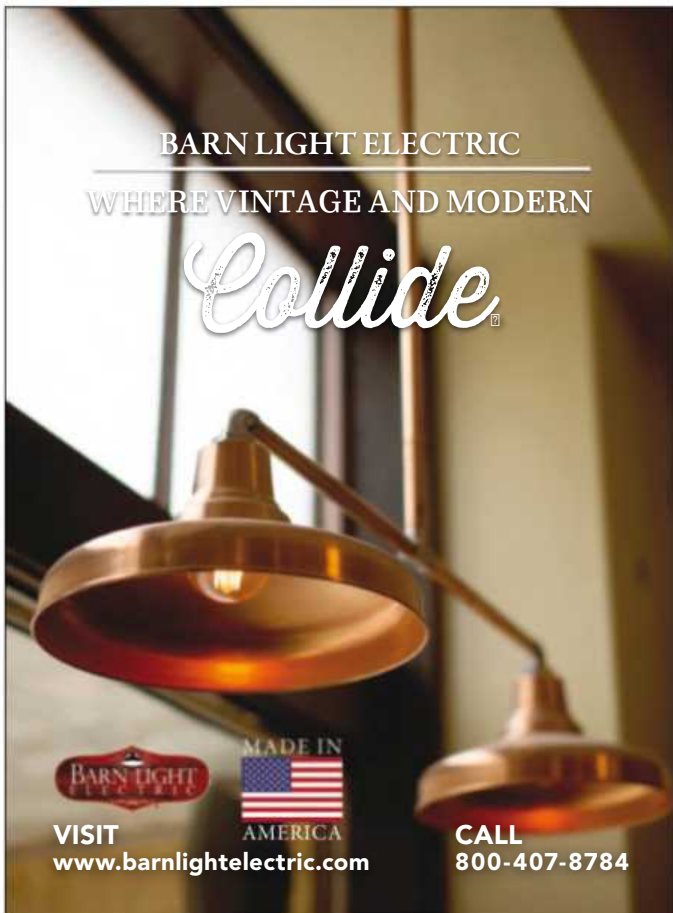
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LOT 61313/62583

47770/62728

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Customer Rating

LOT 69387/62270/62744

68784 shown

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\$369.99 ~~\$389.99~~

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Customer Rating

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HaulMaster
LOT 60497/93888 shown
61899/62399

• 1000 lb. Capacity

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comp at \$19.97

SAVE 54%

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Customer Rating

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Customer Rating

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PACK OF 100

• 5 mil. thickness

\$6 ~~\$7.99~~

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Customer Rating

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\$99.99 ~~\$139.99~~

comp at \$169.99

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LOT 67227 shown
69567/60566/62532

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Customer Rating

10" SLIDING COMPOUND MITER SAW

CHICAGO ELECTRIC POWER TOOLS

Customer Rating

LOT 61971/61972
98199 shown

SAVE \$109

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Customer Rating

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LOT 66619/60338
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Customer Rating

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LOT 66783/60581/62334
60653 shown

SAVE 57%

\$29.99 comp at \$69.99

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Customer Rating

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Customer Rating

MULTIFUNCTION POWER TOOL

CHICAGO ELECTRIC

Customer Rating

LOT 60428/62279
62302/62866
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THE HISTORY In the late 1800s, what is now the Enos Park area of Springfield was noted for its grand houses, owned by local captains of industry. It's no wonder: Just down the road, you could see the Italianate mansion where Mary Todd lived, with her sister Elizabeth, while she was being courted by her future husband, Abraham Lincoln. And around the corner? The site where Lincoln announced his (unsuccessful) 1858 run for the U.S. Senate. So by 1896, when George Helme moved into this newly built Queen Anne, the area was full of trade and political significance. The house has since seen many owners and a few renters but has been empty since 2013, when a hospital purchased the property it sits on.

WHY SAVE IT? The plain-faced exterior hides an interior filled with elaborate features typical of the Queen Anne style. Ornate touches include leaded-glass windows, original wood floors framed with inlaid borders, and fluted casings topped with decorative corner blocks.

WHAT IT NEEDS First, the house must be moved—but the neighborhood association has secured a nearby lot, so you won't have to worry about purchasing one. The front porch and the aluminum siding will need to go, per association requirements; you'll have to replace them with something more period-appropriate. Plumbing and electrical need some updates, and the kitchen requires a refresher too. But overall, the home's in good shape—and just waiting for someone to bring its grand old details back to life. —MEGAN BAKER



1. The 2,800-square-foot house includes four bedrooms and three baths.
2. The balustrade on the front stairs ends in a large, ornate newel post carved with an acorn motif.
3. Many of the original doors remain, including this tall pocket set leading to the front parlor.
4. The foyer is ringed with an inlaid border on the wood floor, plus classical-style stacked baseboards that curve to fit the wall.



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